"For stark, living fear . . . what other writer is even in the running?"
—H. P. LOVECRAFT

THE HORROR STORIES OF ROBERT E. HOWARD

FULLY ILLUSTRATED BY GREG STAPLES

Contents

Title Page

OceanofPDF.com

Dedication

Previous publication information for the stories contained in this work
Illustrations

Foreword

OceanofPDF.com

Introduction

In the Forest of Villefère

A Song of the Werewolf Folk

Wolfshead

Up, John Kane!

Remembrance

The Dream Snake

Sea Curse

The Moor Ghost

Moon Mockery

The Little People

Dead Man's Hate

The Tavern

Rattle of Bones

The Fear That Follows

The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux

Casonetto's Last Song

The Touch of Death

Out of the Deep

A Legend of Faring Town

RestlessWaters

The Shadow of the Beast

The Dead Slaver's Tale

Dermod's Bane

The Hills of the Dead

Dig Me No Grave

The Song of a Mad Minstrel

The Children of the Night

Musings

The Black Stone

The Thing on the Roof

The Dweller in Dark Valley

The Horror from the Mound

A Dull Sound as of Knocking

People of the Dark

Delenda Est

The Cairn on the Headland

Worms of the Earth

The Symbol

The Valley of the Lost

The Hoofed Thing

The Noseless Horror

The Dwellers Under the Tomb

An Open Window

The House of Arabu

The Man on the Ground

Old Garfield's Heart

Kelly the Conjure-Man

Black Canaan

To a Woman

One Who Comes at Eventide

The Haunter of the Ring

Pigeons from Hell

The Dead Remember

The Fire of Asshurbanipal

Fragment

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

Miscellanea

Golnor the Ape

Spectres in the Dark

The House

Untitled Fragment

Appendix

Notes on the Original Howard Texts

OceanofPDF.com

Acknowledgments

The Fully Illustrated Robert E. Howard Library from Del Rey Books Copyright

For Karen

Greg Staples

In the Forest of Villefère

first published in *Weird Tales,* August 1925

A Song of the Werewolf Folk

first published in *Etchings and Odysseys,* 1987

Wolfshead

first published in *Weird Tales,* April 1926

Up, John Kane!

first published in *Up, John Kane!,* 1977

Remembrance

first published in *Weird Tales,* April 1928

The Dream Snake

first published in *Weird Tales,* February 1928

Sea Curse

first published in *Weird Tales,* May 1928

The Moor Ghost

first published in *Weird Tales,* September 1929

Moon Mockery

first published in *Weird Tales,* April 1929

The Little People

first published in *Coven 13*, January 1970

Dead Man's Hate

first published in *Weird Tales,* January 1930

The Tavern

first published in *Singers in the Shadows,* 1970

Rattle of Bones

first published in *Weird Tales,* June 1929

The Fear That Follows

first published in *Singers in the Shadows,* 1970

The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux

first published in *Ghost Stories,* April 1929 (as *The Apparition in the Prize Ring*) *Casonetto's Last Song*

first published in *Etchings and Odysseys,* 1973

The Touch of Death

first published in *Weird Tales,* February 1930 (as *The Fearsome Touch of Death*) *Out of the Deep*

first published in *Magazine of Horror*, November 1967

A Legend of Faring Town

first published in *Verses in Ebony*, 1975

Restless Waters

first published in *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, 1974

The Shadow of the Beast

first published in *The Shadow of the Beast*, 1977

The Dead Slaver's Tale

first published in *Weirdbook*, 1973

Dermod's Bane

first published in *Magazine of Horror,* Fall 1967

The Hills of the Dead

first published in *Weird Tales*, August 1930

Dig Me No Grave

first published in *Weird Tales*, February 1937

The Song of a Mad Minstrel

first published in *Weird Tales*, February–March 1931

The Children of the Night

first published in *Weird Tales*, April–May 1931

Musings

first published in *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, January–February 1971

The Black Stone

first published in *Weird Tales*, November 1931

The Thing on the Roof

first published in *Weird Tales*, February 1932

The Dweller in Dark Valley

first published in *Magazine of Horror*, November 1965

The Horror from the Mound

first published in *Weird Tales*, May 1932

A Dull Sound as of Knocking

first published in *A Rhyme of Salem Town and Other Poems*, 2007

People of the Dark

first published in *Strange Tales*, June 1932

Delenda Est

first published in *Worlds of Fantasy*, 1968

The Cairn on the Headland

first published in S *trange Tales*, January 1933

Worms of the Earth

first published in *Weird Tales*, November 1932

The Symbol

first appeared in *Ariel*, Autumn 1976

The Valley of the Lost

first published in *Startling Mystery Stories*, Spring 1967 (as *The Secret of Lost Valley*) *The Hoofed Thing*

first published in *Weirdbook Three*, 1970 (as *Usurp the Night*) *The Noseless Horror*

first published in *Magazine of Horror*, February 1970

The Dwellers Under the Tomb

first published in *Lost Fantasies,* 1976

An Open Window

first published in *Weird Tales, September* 1932

The House of Arabu

first published in *Avon Fantasy Reader,* 1952 (as *The Witch from Hell's Kitchen*) *The Man on the Ground*

first published in *Weird Tales,* July 1933

Old Garfield's Heart

first published in *Weird Tales*, December 1933

Kelly the Conjure-Man

first published in *The Howard Collector*, Summer 1964

Black Canaan

first published in *Weird Tales*, June 1936

To a Woman

first published in *Modern American Poetry*, 1933

One Who Comes at Eventide

first published in *Modern American Poetry*, 1933

The Haunter of the Ring

first published in *Weird Tales*, June 1934

Pigeons from Hell

first published in *Weird Tales*, May 1938

The Dead Remember

first published in *Argosy*, August 15, 1936

The Fire of Asshurbanipal

first published in *Weird Tales*, December 1936

Fragment

first published in *Weird Tales*, December 1937

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

first published in *Weird Tales*, October 1937

Golnor the Ape

first published in *Crypt of Cthulhu*, Roodmas 1985

Spectres in the Dark

first published in *Cromlech*, Spring 1985

The House

first published in *The New Howard Reader*, 2003

Untitled Fragment

first published in *The Howard Collector*, Spring 1967

Illustrations

Like a shadow it moved upon de Montour

“Sea fiend,” I said in an unsteady voice

He halted, frozen

And about clustered the–Things

The sky was overcast with misty gray

He parried the bird-thing’s stroke

Yar Ali fired point-blank from the hip with deadly effect

Foreword

I have been a professional illustrator for nearly twenty years and was inspired, like many artists, by the work of Frank Frazetta. I first saw his Conan paintings when I was eight years old, and I can still remember where I stood and what the furniture in my neighbor’s house looked like at the time–and twenty years later, Howard’s writing still has the same effect. Howard is a master of atmosphere and detail, and when I read his stories, I am in them; I can see the buttons on the costumes, smell the dank air, and feel the foreboding. So, although illustrating his work has been a dream project, it has not been an easy one! For doing such a master justice is no small task–but, nevertheless, it’s incredibly rewarding.

To follow in the footsteps of the mighty Frazetta is one thing, but to follow in Howard’s is quite another.

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed illustrating it.

Greg Staples

2008

OceanofPDF.com

Introduction

He was almost alone in his ability to create real emotions of fear and of dread suspense…. For stark, living fear…the actual smell and feel and darkness and brooding horror and impending doom that inhere in that nighted, moss-hung jungle…what other writer is even in the running with REH?

—H. P. LOVECRAFT

In 1923 a new magazine appeared on the newsstands of America, proclaiming itself "The Unique Magazine": *Weird Tales*. It was intended by its publishers to be a market for the sort of "off-trail" stories that other magazines would not publish, but while it did become the first professional magazine to publish H. P. Lovecraft, its first editor showed perhaps too great a fondness for traditional ghost stories.

Following a shaky first year, though, a new editor, Farnsworth Wright, took the reins, adding to the masthead "A Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual." He would quickly make good on that claim, and among his first accomplishments was acceptance, in the fall of 1924, of a story of prehistoric adventure by an eighteen-year-old Texan named Robert E. Howard.

Howard and *Weird Tales* would remain closely associated for the next dozen years, until the author took his own life at the age of thirty. During that period, forty-eight stories and twenty-one poems by Robert E. Howard appeared in the magazine, and he became one of its most popular writers, along with Lovecraft and Seabury Quinn. His fame rests largely on the fantasy adventures of Conan, Kull, Solomon Kane, Bran Mak Morn, and Turlogh O'Brien, stories in which he created a new subgenre that has come to be known as sword and sorcery, blending together elements of heroic adventure and horror. As the stories in this volume will demonstrate, he was also a master of horror, who brought to it a strong dash of adventure.

Though a great admirer of the "cosmic horror" of Lovecraft and the imaginative sweep of Clark Ashton Smith, Howard was by nature an

adventure writer, and his concerns were human, not cosmic. “It is the individual mainly which draws me—the struggling, blundering, passionate insect vainly striving against the river of Life and seeking to divert the channel of events to suit himself—breaking his fangs on the iron collar of Fate and sinking into final defeat with the froth of a curse on his lips,” he wrote to Lovecraft.

Where Lovecraft’s characters frequently are driven to madness by what they have seen, Howard’s will more frequently be provoked into action. Howard’s characters, as a general rule, refuse to give up or to run away, no matter how heavily the odds are stacked against them. Howard also brings to his work a gift of poetry, a talent for creating moody or atmospheric effects with just a few broad strokes, and a strong emotionalism that heightens the dramatic effects.

As with many naturally gifted storytellers, Howard’s earliest works are marked by a creative exuberance that is sometimes only barely under control. “Wolfshead,” for example, demonstrates that the young writer is not afraid to play with conventions of the horror genre, in this case the werewolf. On the other hand, the author recognized that he had perhaps gotten carried away with himself, writing to a friend,

“After reading it, I’m not altogether sure I wasn’t off my noodler when I wrote it. I sure mixed slavers, duelists, harlots, drunkards, maniacs and cannibals reckless. The narrator is a libertine and a Middle Ages fop; the leading lady is a harlot, the hero is a lunatic, one of the main characters is a slave trader, one a pervert, one a drunkard, no they’re all drunkards, but one is a gambler, one a duelist and one a cannibal slave.”

Farnsworth Wright, however, thought well enough of the tale not only to buy it, but to make it the cover story for the April 1926 issue, and therein is an interesting story itself. In January of that year, Wright wrote to Howard asking if he had a carbon copy of the story: the artist assigned to provide the cover painting and interior pen-and-ink illustration had not returned the manuscript, and there was no time to lose in typesetting if the story was to make it into the April issue. Howard, at this stage in his career, had not developed the habit of making carbon copies. So the young writer sat down, rewrote the story from memory, and sent it off. Shortly thereafter he learned

that the manuscript had been found, missing the first page, which was taken from his rewrite.

Howard's elation at making an extra ten dollars for his efforts (on top of the forty dollars he'd already been promised) was short-lived. As he later told a correspondent, he "one day got the advance pages of *Wolfshead* which was about to be published. Reading it over I was so depressed and discouraged that I went and got a job jerking soda in a drug-store."

Readers reacted to the story much more positively than the author. While it was not voted the most popular tale in the April issue (Lovecraft's "The Outsider" won that honor), it placed a very respectable third. Years later, writing about Howard to E. Hoffmann Price, Lovecraft said, "I first became conscious of him as a coming leader just a decade ago—when I read *Wolfshead.* …I saw that WT had landed a big-timer."

Most young writers are, of course, inclined to emulate other writers whom they admire or respect, and Howard was no exception. Sometimes the influences are quite apparent, as in "The Little People," based on the work of Welsh master Arthur Machen (who is mentioned in Howard's tale, along with his story

"The Shining Pyramid"), a prelude to what will become an important motif in some of Howard's finest stories ("The Children of the Night," "People of the Dark," "Worms of the Earth," "The Valley of the Lost," etc.). Less explicit are influences like Ambrose Bierce (whose "A Watcher by the Dead" must surely have inspired "The Touch of Death") and Jack London (if indeed the Faring Town tales may be said to owe something to Howard's favorite writer). Undoubtedly Howard was occasionally influenced by something he'd read in the magazines. Sometimes stories came from his own dreams (as he claimed was the case with "The Dream Snake").

Yet Howard is never entirely derivative. Always there is something in his work that marks it as his. As Lovecraft would later recognize, "Seldom if ever did he set down a lifeless stock character or situation and leave it as such. Before he concluded with it, it always took on some tinge of vitality and reality…always drew something from his own experience and knowledge of life instead of from the sterile herbarium of dessicated

pulpish standbys." As with his werewolves, other Howard creations do not seem to follow traditional guidelines: the merman of "Out of the Deep" seems not so much a creature of the sea as an embodiment of the cold, cruel sea itself; his ghosts take varied forms in such tales as "The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux" and "The Shadow of the Beast." The Tavern of the poem is "like a monster"—no mere building, but a sinister life form. To my mind, though, his most effective accomplishment is the way he can make fear, or guilt, or hate, or other intense psychological states assume almost tangible form. Howard was a very emotional writer, and it adds a heightened sense of urgency to his tales and poems. "The Touch of Death," "The Fear that Follows," and "The Dead Slavers' Tale" are but three examples—almost all the stories herein will illustrate the point as well.

In the fall of 1927 Howard wrote a story about an Elizabethan-era swordsman who pursues a trail of vengeance into Darkest Africa, where he meets with sorcery and witnesses a bestial retribution. He'd intended to send it to *Weird Tales*, still at that time the only magazine that had accepted any of his stories. However, on a whim he sent it to *Argosy*, one of the better pulp magazines, instead, and was rewarded with a personal letter from an associate editor who, while rejecting it, said "You seem to have caught the knack of writing good action & plenty of it into your stories." Considerably buoyed, Howard wrote to his friend Clyde Smith, "So, if a despised weird tale, whose whole minor tone is occultism, can create that much interest with a magazine which never publishes straight weird stuff, I don't feel so much discouraged." He sent the story without modification to *Weird Tales*, which published it in the August 1928 issue as "Red Shadows," the first of Howard's tales of the swashbuckling Puritan Solomon Kane, and the first of his many successful heroic fantasy series.

All of Howard's sword-and-sorcery stories include elements of horror, but the Kane series in particular is every bit as much horror as it is adventure. Some of these are set in England or Continental Europe: we have selected here "Rattle of Bones," in which a chance encounter in the Black Forest leads Kane to a confrontation with evil in a lonely tavern. Others are set in Darkest Africa, that fictional continent so beloved of the adventure writers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a mysterious land of jungles teeming with life inimical to man, of strange peoples and cults,

bizarre flora and fauna, a land largely unexplored, in which might lie lost cities or civilizations from remotest antiquity. Howard certainly was not the first, nor the last, writer to make use of the possibilities of Darkest Africa, but as Lovecraft said, he brought to "the shadow-haunted ruins of unknown and primordial cities in the African jungle…an aura of pre-human fear and necromancy which no other writer could duplicate." In "Hills of the Dead,"

Kane enlists the aid of his blood brother, the shaman N'Longa (and what is a God-fearing Puritan doing with a shaman blood brother, anyway?), in combatting an ancient race of walking dead. Again we find Howard challenging the traditions: What are these creatures? Kane calls them vampires, but they are not the blood drinkers of *Dracula* and its imitators. There is a host of them swarming the hills, and Kane finds he must fight demons with demonry.

In 1930, Howard and Lovecraft at last began that correspondence that has come to be recognized as perhaps the greatest in fantasy circles. The two discussed and debated myriad topics, and inevitably the ideas found their way into each author's work. Howard perhaps shows the influences more directly and openly, at least at first. The early stages of the epistolary friendship inspired the younger writer to experiment with stories in the Lovecraftian vein, producing "The Children of the Night," "The Black Stone" (thought by many to be the finest Cthulhu Mythos story not written by Lovecraft), "The Thing on the Roof," and the last of his Solomon Kane stories, "The Footsteps Within," within a matter of months.

Because Howard was—consciously or unconsciously—emulating the Lovecraft style, and making use of terms or concepts from Lovecraft, these stories are frequently thought of as belonging to the Cthulhu Mythos. A word about this is in order.

The Cthulhu Mythos refers to a sort of pseudomythology that originated in the work of Lovecraft, many of whose stories are loosely linked by being set in a fictional New England (with the towns of Arkham, Kingsport, Dunwich, and Innsmouth, among others), and by their references to various cosmic entities that are entirely indifferent to man but nevertheless are worshipped as gods by some cultists (Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlethotep, etc.). Lovecraft inserted glancing references to these entities in some of the

work he revised for other authors, like Adolphe de Castro and Zelia Bishop, and a few people noticed, including Robert E. Howard. In one of his early letters to Lovecraft, Howard inquired about these entities:

“I have noted in your stories you refer to Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, R’lyeh, Yuggoth etc. Adolph de Castro, I note, mentions these gods, places, or whatever they are, only the spelling is different, as Cthulutl, Yog Sototl. Both you and he, I believe, have used the phrase fhtaghn…. Would it be asking too-much to ask you to tell me the significance of the above mentioned names or terms? And the Arab Alhazred, and the Necronomicon. The mention of these things in your superb stories have whetted my interest immensely. I would extremely appreciate any information you would give me regarding them.”

Lovecraft was quick to disabuse Howard of the idea that there was some body of esoteric lore that his scholarship had missed:

“Regarding the solemnly cited myth-cycle of Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, R’lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Nug, Yeb, Shub-Niggurath, etc., etc.—let me confess that this is all a synthetic concoction of my own, like the populous and varied pantheon of Lord Dunsany’s “Pagana.” The reason for its echoes in Dr. de Castro’s work is that the latter gentleman is a revision-client of mine—into whose tales I have stuck these glancing references for sheer fun. If any other clients of mine get work placed in W.T., you will perhaps find a still-wider spread of the cult of Azathoth, Cthulhu, and the Great Old Ones! The Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred is likewise something which must yet be written in order to possess objective reality…. Long has alluded to the Necronomicon in some things of his—in fact, I think it is rather good fun to have this artificial mythology given an air of verisimilitude by wide citation.” Lovecraft mentioned that Clark Ashton Smith was beginning a similar pseudomythology involving “the furry toad-god Tsathoggua,” and suggested that he might incorporate Howard’s Kathulos (from “Skull-Face”) into some future tale.

Howard was not long in joining the fun. Within two months of receiving Lovecraft’s reply, he had submitted “The Children of the Night” and it had been accepted by *Weird Tales*. In it he had referred to Lovecraft’s “The Call of Cthulhu” as one of the three “master horror-tales” (the others being Poe’s

“The Fall of the House of Usher” and Machen’s *The Novel of the Black Seal*) and had made his own first contribution to the Mythos, in the form of the German scholar Von Junzt and his forbidden tome, *Nameless Cults*. He would soon make other contributions, such as the mad poet Justin Geoffrey and the alien entity Gol-goroth. Other of his creations, such as the serpent men of Valusia (from the Kull series), Bran Mak Morn, and, indeed, Kathulos, would be adopted by Lovecraft and others in their own tales.

But we must draw an important distinction here between the use of these names or concepts as “general background-material” (in Lovecraft’s words), as opposed to their being the central conceit or plot driver of a story. As David Schultz and others have noted, neither Lovecraft nor his friends made any effort to codify any of this, seeing it more as something fun, something to give a flavor of real myth and legend to the background of their stories, than as a serious attempt to create a mythos. (Lovecraft himself used the tongue-in-cheek term “Yog-Sothothery”). Thus, Howard may occasionally refer to one of Lovecraft’s cosmic entities or allude to the Necronomicon or R’lyeh, but these mentions are usually incidental to the actual story. While it is fun to play the Mythos game, it should not lead the reader to assume that Howard (or others of Lovecraft’s peers) were consciously attempting to write Mythos stories.

One story, for example, in which glancing Mythos references are found, but which is wholly a Robert E.

Howard story, is “Worms of the Earth,” featuring another of Howard’s great heroic fantasy characters, the Pictish king Bran Mak Morn: last in a line of kings stretching back into mankind’s dawn, born to lead a savage, degenerated people in a last-ditch effort to prevent the legions of Roman Britain from overrunning their northern homeland, knowing that the fight will ultimately be lost but refusing to surrender. The “hideous and compelling power” that Lovecraft found in the story does not come from monsters or a sense of cosmic despair: it comes from watching the terrible consequences that flow from an all-too-human paroxysm of anger and desire for revenge. The story is considered by many Howard fans and scholars to be his finest tale; it works not only as an extraordinary heroic

fantasy, but as a grim and atmospheric work of horror, and is perhaps his most effective use of the “little people” motif.

Howard’s letters to Lovecraft frequently included tales of the old West, or of current conditions and events in Texas, and Lovecraft, himself an ardent regionalist (most of his stories being set in a fictional New England), encouraged Howard to make greater use of his native Southwest and its traditions in his fiction. This encouragement eventually prodded him into the creation of several of his finest and most distinctive works of horror or the supernatural, with tales set in the Southwest or in the “piney woods” of the Texas-Arkansas borderlands.

The first of these “regional” works to appear in print was “The Horror from the Mound,” set in West Texas and featuring a young cowpuncher who laments his decision to give up his life as a cowboy to buy a farm. The story reflects two threads from Howard’s letters to Lovecraft: his considerable sympathy for farmers, who were struggling mightily as the Depression began to settle over the land; and his interest in the legends of lost Spanish treasures, which have been popular in Texas since before the Spanish left.

Most important, of course, Howard shows he is still interested in taking on tropes of the horror genre—here, the vampire again—and giving them an unusual treatment. Too unusual for one poor *Weird Tales* reader, who complained that “The Horror from the Mound” [contained] no less than four flagrant breaches of accepted vampire tradition.” As we have seen, Howard was no respecter of literary traditions. In fact, it might be said that, with this story, Howard had finally succeeded in bringing together all three of his favorite genres—western, adventure, and the weird—to create the first “weird western.”

Following “The Horror from the Mound,” Howard turned increasingly to his native environs for other tales of horror and the supernatural. “The Valley of the Lost” makes use of the theme of little people, essentially transferring elements of “The Children of the Night” and “Worms of the Earth” to the Southwest and giving the story an ending we might more expect of Lovecraft than of Howard. “The Man on the Ground” is a very short tale but a gripping meditation on the power of hate, a crystallization of all Howard had learned in his study of Texas feuds. It is a fine example of

that ability we noted earlier to lend almost tangible form to an abstract emotion. “Old Garfield’s Heart,” in which early Texas Indian fights and legends play a prominent part, is about as close to home as Howard gets in a story: Lost Knob is his fictional counterpart to his hometown of Cross Plains. The dark magic of “The Dead Remember” is all the darker when set against the authentic backdrop of a cattle drive. These stories, along with his increasingly confident handling of westerns, convinced Lovecraft that “in time he would have made his mark…with some folk-epic of his beloved southwest.”

The story generally considered Howard’s finest horror tale, though, was not set in the Southwest, but in the South. Texas straddles both geographic regions, and Howard explained to Lovecraft that a dividing line ran between Dallas, which was in East Texas and looked to the south, and Fort Worth, which was, as its slogan goes, “Where the West Begins.” Bagwell, where the Howards lived when Robert was about eight years old, is east of Dallas, on the fringes of the Piney Woods area that takes in parts of southwestern Arkansas, northwestern Louisiana, and East Texas. And it is in Bagwell that we find the genesis of “Pigeons from Hell.”

“I well remember the tales I listened to and shivered at, when a child in the ‘piney woods’ of East Texas, where Red River marks the Arkansaw and Texas boundaries,” Howard wrote to Lovecraft (using the phonetic spelling for his father’s native state). “There were quite a number of old slave darkies still living then. The one to whom I listened most was the cook, old Aunt Mary Bohannon…. Another tale she told that I have often met with in negro-lore. The setting, time and circumstances are changed by telling, but the tale remains basically the same. Two or three men—usually negroes—are travelling in a wagon through some isolated district—usually a broad, deserted river-bottom. They come on to the ruins of a once thriving plantation at dusk, and decide to spend the night in the deserted plantation house. This house is always huge, brooding and forbidding, and always, as the men approach the high columned verandah, through the high weeds that surround the house, great numbers of pigeons rise from their roosting places on the railing and fly away. The men sleep in the big front-room with its crumbling fire-place, and in the night they are awakened by a jangling of chains, weird noises and groans from upstairs. Sometimes footsteps descend

the stairs with no visible cause. Then a terrible apparition appears to the men who flee in terror. This monster, in all the tales I have heard, is invariably a headless giant, naked or clad in shapeless sort of garment, and is sometimes armed with a broad-axe. This motif appears over and over in negro-lore."

Just how familiar Howard might have been with "negro-lore" must remain a matter of some conjecture (he lived most of his life, other than that short period in Bagwell and a few weeks in New Orleans, in communities in which there were few, if any, African Americans), but certainly he used what he did know to good effect. Critical consensus seems to concur with Stephen King's remark that "Pigeons from Hell"

is "one of the finest horror stories of [the twentieth] century." It was later adapted for television's *Thriller!* , an anthology series hosted by Boris Karloff, and is widely regarded as the best episode of that series, "one of the most truly frightening journeys into small-screen fantasy."

"Pigeons from Hell" and other of the piney woods stories (such as "The Shadow of the Beast" and

"Black Canaan") contain some language and attitudes that many readers will find uncomfortable or offensive. Not to put too fine a point on it, Howard was a product of his time and place, the early-twentieth-century South and Southwest, and casually racist attitudes went along with it. In addition, he was writing for the pulp magazines, and stereotyping of ethnic groups served as a kind of shorthand for the writers and readers of this form of popular fiction: Asians, Native Americans, Latins, Irish, Swedes, Eastern Europeans, and others are frequently not treated any better in pulp stories than blacks, whether African or African American, are. But in "Pigeons from Hell," "Black Canaan," "The Dead Remember," and other tales, Howard also displays his considerable gifts for narrative and invention, and his extraordinary talent for creating that atmosphere of "fear and dread suspense" that Lovecraft noted; and I believe that a closer look at the stories reveals considerable sympathy with the downtrodden.

In "The Dead Remember," for instance, it is clear that Howard's sympathies lie with Joel and Jezebel, rather than with the cowboy who murders them in

a drunken rage, and in “Pigeons from Hell,” it seems equally clear that his sympathies lie with the “mulatto” maid Joan and not with her white tormentor, Celia Blassenville. Howard’s own extreme sensitivity to authority (“Life’s not worth living if somebody thinks he’s in authority over you,” he told one correspondent) may have been at the root of his discomfort with mistreatment of slaves (“Thank God the slaves on my ancestors’ plantations were never so misused”), and this, along with pride in his Southern heritage, may be why he chose to make the Blassenvilles Creoles from the West Indies rather than Southerners. In “Black Canaan,” it is true that the villains are Saul Stark, the conjure man, and his “quadroon” accomplice, the Bride of Damballah, but here I believe Howard’s sympathies lie as much with the swamp blacks, over whom Stark holds sway not so much by holding out the promise of liberation as through fear of being “put in the swamp,” as with the white inhabitants of the town. In fact, when he names the white town Grimesville, the black settlement Goshen, and the region in which both are found Canaan, I think he may be subtly—perhaps unconsciously—displaying his sympathies with the oppressed.

We have appended to this volume four fragmentary tales that, so far as can be learned, Howard never completed. Two of these will fall into the Cthulhu Mythos: “The House” concerns Justin Geoffrey, and provides a tantalizing hint of where his madness began; the “Untitled Fragment” that begins “Beneath the glare of the sun…” explicitly links the Conan series to the Mythos, through discussion of Conan’s Hyborian Age in *Nameless Cults*. (The title *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, used here by Howard for the only time, was actually coined by August Derleth, at the request of Lovecraft, who had wanted a title that would serve as the original German. Lovecraft ardently promoted the use of Derleth’s version because of its “sinister, mouth-filling rhythm.”) The other two fragments employ, in my view, some very interesting concepts. “Golnor the Ape,” with its protagonist who had “lived in two worlds” and who is yet able to see and converse with beings of that mysterious “other” world, and “Spectres in the Dark,” in which men seem to be driven mad by things that move in the shadows but cannot be seen, offer intriguing glimpses into the fertile imagination of Robert E. Howard.

Settle back in your chair and let that imagination sweep you into worlds of mystery, adventure, and terror. You might first want to be sure there are no deep shadows in the room.

Rusty Burke

February 2008

In the Forest of Villefère

The sun had set. The great shadows came striding over the forest. In the weird twilight of a late summer day, I saw the path ahead glide on among the mighty trees and disappear. And I shuddered and glanced fearfully over my shoulder. Miles behind lay the nearest village–miles ahead the next.

I looked to left and to right as I strode on, and anon I looked behind me. And anon I stopped short, grasping my rapier, as a breaking twig betokened the going of some small beast. Or was it a beast?

But the path led on and I followed, because, forsooth, I had naught else to do.

As I went I bethought me, “My own thoughts will rout me, if I be not aware. What is there in this forest, except perhaps the creatures that roam it, deer and the like? Tush, the foolish legends of those villagers!”

And so I went and the twilight faded into dusk. Stars began to blink and the leaves of the trees murmured in the faint breeze. And then I stopped short, my sword leaping to my hand, for just ahead, around a curve of the path, someone was singing. The words I could not distinguish, but the accent was strange, almost barbaric.

I stepped behind a great tree, and the cold sweat beaded my forehead. Then the singer came in sight, a tall, thin man, vague in the twilight. I shrugged my shoulders. A *man* I did not fear. I sprang out, my point raised.

“Stand!”

He showed no surprize. “I prithee, handle thy blade with care, friend,” he said.

Somewhat ashamed, I lowered my sword.

“I am new to this forest,” I quoth, apologetically. “I heard talk of bandits. I crave pardon. Where lies the road to Villefère?”

“*Corbleu*, you’ve missed it,” he answered. “You should have branched off to the right some distance back. I am going there myself. If you may abide my company, I will direct you.”

I hesitated. Yet why should I hesitate?

“Why, certainly. My name is de Montour, of Normandy.”

“And I am Carolus le Loup.”

“No!” I started back.

He looked at me in astonishment.

“Pardon,” said I; “the name is strange. Does not *loup* mean wolf?”

“My family were always great hunters,” he answered. He did not offer his hand.

“You will pardon my staring,” said I as we walked down the path, “but I can hardly see your face in the dusk.”

I sensed that he was laughing, though he made no sound.

“It is little to look upon,” he answered.

I stepped closer and then leaped away, my hair bristling.

“A mask!” I exclaimed. “Why do you wear a mask, *m’sieu*?”

“It is a vow,” he explained. “In fleeing a pack of hounds I vowed that if I escaped I would wear a mask for a certain time.”

“Hounds, *m’sieu*?”

“Wolves,” he answered quickly; “I said wolves.”

We walked in silence for a while and then my companion said, “I am surprized that you walk these woods by night. Few people come these ways even in the day.”

“I am in haste to reach the border,” I answered. “A treaty has been signed with the English, and the Duke of Burgundy should know of it. The people at the village sought to dissuade me. They spoke of a–wolf that was purported to roam these woods.”

“Here the path branches to Villefère,” said he, and I saw a narrow, crooked path that I had not seen when I passed it before. It led in amid the darkness of the trees. I shuddered.

“You wish to return to the village?”

“No!” I exclaimed. “No, no! Lead on.”

So narrow was the path that we walked single file, he leading. I looked well at him. He was taller, much taller than I, and thin, wiry. He was dressed in a costume that smacked of Spain. A long rapier swung at his hip. He walked with long easy strides, noiselessly.

Then he began to talk of travel and adventure. He spoke of many lands and seas he had seen and many strange things. So we talked and went farther and farther into the forest.

I presumed that he was French, and yet he had a very strange accent, that was neither French nor Spanish nor English, not like any language I had ever heard. Some words he slurred strangely and some he could not pronounce at all.

“This path is not often used, is it?” I asked.

“Not by many,” he answered and laughed silently. I shuddered. It was very dark and the leaves whispered together among the branches.

“A fiend haunts this forest,” I said.

“So the peasants say,” he answered, “but I have roamed it oft and have never seen his face.”

Then he began to speak of strange creatures of darkness, and the moon rose and shadows glided among the trees. He looked up at the moon.

“Haste!” said he. “We must reach our destination before the moon reaches her zenith.”

We hurried along the trail.

“They say,” said I, “that a werewolf haunts these woodlands.”

“It might be,” said he, and we argued much upon the subject.

“The old women say,” said he, “that if a werewolf is slain while a wolf, then he is slain, but if he is slain as a man, then his half-soul will haunt his slayer forever. But haste thee, the moon nears her zenith.”

We came into a small moonlit glade and the stranger stopped.

“Let us pause a while,” said he.

“Nay, let us be gone,” I urged; “I like not this place.”

He laughed without sound. “Why,” said he, “this is a fair glade. As good as a banquet hall it is, and many times have I feasted here. Ha, ha, ha! Look ye, I will show you a dance.” And he began bounding here and there, anon flinging back his head and laughing silently. Thought I, the man is mad.

As he danced his weird dance I looked about me. *The trail went not on but stopped in the glade*.

“Come,” said I, “we must on. Do you not smell the rank, hairy scent that hovers about the glade? Wolves den here. Perhaps they are about us and are gliding upon us even now.”

He dropped upon all fours, bounded higher than my head, and came toward me with a strange slinking motion.

“That dance is called the Dance of the Wolf,” said he, and my hair bristled.

“Keep off!” I stepped back, and with a screech that set the echoes shuddering he leaped for me, and though a sword hung at his belt he did not draw it. My rapier was half out when he grasped my arm and flung me headlong. I dragged him with me and we struck the ground together. Wrenching a hand free I jerked off the mask. A shriek of horror broke from my lips. Beast eyes glittered beneath that mask, white fangs flashed in the moonlight. *The face was that of a wolf.*

In an instant those fangs were at my throat. Taloned hands tore the sword from my grasp. I beat at that horrible face with my clenched fists, but his jaws were fastened on my shoulder, his talons tore at my throat. Then I was on my back. The world was fading. Blindly I struck out. My hand dropped, then closed automatically about the hilt of my dagger, which I had been unable to get at. I drew and stabbed.

A terrible, half-bestial bellowing screech. Then I reeled to my feet, free. At my feet lay the werewolf.

I stooped, raised the dagger, then paused, looked up. The moon hovered close to her zenith. *If I slew the thing as a man its frightful spirit would haunt me forever*. I sat down waiting. The *thing* watched me with flaming wolf eyes. The long wiry limbs seemed to shrink, to crook; hair seemed to grow upon them. Fearing madness, I snatched up the *thing’s* own sword and hacked it to pieces. Then I flung the sword away and fled.

A Song of the Werewolf Folk

Sink white fangs in the throat of Life,

Lap up the red that gushes

In the cold dark gloom of the bare black stones,

In the gorge where the black wind rushes.

Slink where the titan boulders poise

And the chasms grind thereunder,

Over the mountains black and bare

In the teeth of the brooding thunder.

Why should we wish for the fertile fields,

Valley and crystal fountain?

This is our doom–the hunger-trail,

The wolf and the storm-stalked mountain.

Over us stalk the bellowing gods

Where the dusk and the twilight sever;

Under their iron goatish hoofs

They crunch our skulls forever.

Mercy and hope and pity–all,

Bubbles the black crags sunder;

Hunger is all the gods have left

And the death that lurks thereunder.

Glut mad fangs in the blood of Life

To slake the thirst past sating,

Before the blind worms mouth our bones

And the vulture’s beak is grating.

Wolfshead

Fear? Your pardon, *Messieurs*, but the meaning of fear you do not know. No, I hold to my statement.

You are soldiers, adventurers. You have known the charges of regiments of dragoons, the frenzy of wind-lashed seas. But fear, real hair-raising, horror-crawling fear, you have not known. I myself have known such fear; but until the legions of darkness swirl from hell’s gate and the world flames to ruin, will never such fear again be known to men.

Hark, I will tell you the tale; for it was many years ago and half across the world, and none of you will ever see the man of whom I tell you, or seeing, know.

Return, then, with me across the years to a day when I, a reckless young cavalier, stepped from the small boat that had landed me from the ship floating in the harbor, cursed the mud that littered the crude wharf, and strode up the landing toward the castle, in answer to the invitation of an old friend, Dom Vincente da Lusto.

Dom Vincente was a strange, far-sighted man–a strong man, one who saw visions beyond the ken of his time. In his veins, perhaps, ran the blood of those old Phoenicians who, the priests tell us, ruled the seas and built cities in far lands, in the dim ages. His plan of fortune was strange and yet successful; few men would have thought of it; fewer could have succeeded. For his estate was upon the western coast of that dark, mystic continent, that baffler of explorers–Africa.

There by a small bay had he cleared away the sullen jungle, built his castle and his storehouses, and with ruthless hand had he wrested the riches of the land. Four ships he had: three smaller craft and one great galleon. These

plied between his domains and the cities of Spain, Portugal, France, and even England, laden with rare woods, ivory, slaves; the thousand strange riches that Dom Vincente had gained by trade and by conquest.

Aye, a wild venture, a wilder commerce. And yet might he have shaped an empire from the dark land, had it not been for the rat-faced Carlos, his nephew–but I run ahead of my tale.

Look, *Messieurs*, I draw a map on the table, thus, with finger dipped in wine. Here lay the small, shallow harbor, and here the wide wharves. A landing ran thus, up the slight slope with hutlike warehouses on each side, and here it stopped at a wide, shallow moat. Over it went a narrow drawbridge and then one was confronted with a high palisade of logs set in the ground. This extended entirely around the castle.

The castle itself was built on the model of another, earlier age, being more for strength than beauty. Built of stone brought from a great distance; years of labor and a thousand negroes toiling beneath the lash had reared its walls, and now, completed, it offered an almost impregnable appearance. Such was the intention of its builders, for Barbary pirates ranged the coasts, and the horror of a native uprising lurked ever near.

A space of about a half-mile on every side of the castle was kept cleared away and roads had been built through the marshy land. All this had required an immense amount of labor, but man-power was plentiful.

A present to a chief, and he furnished all that was needed. And Portuguese know how to make men work!

Less than three hundred yards to the east of the castle ran a wide, shallow river, which emptied into the harbor. The name has entirely slipt my mind. It was a heathenish title and I could never lay my tongue to it.

I found that I was not the only friend invited to the castle. It seems that once a year or some such matter, Dom Vincente brought a host of jolly companions to his lonely estate and made merry for some weeks, to make up for the work and solitude of the rest of the year.

In fact, it was nearly night, and a great banquet was in progress when I entered. I was acclaimed with great delight, greeted boisterously by friends and introduced to such strangers as were there.

Entirely too weary to take much part in the revelry, I ate, drank quietly, listened to the toasts and songs, and studied the feasters.

Dom Vincente, of course, I knew, as I had been intimate with him for years; also his pretty niece, Ysabel, who was one reason I had accepted his invitation to come to that stinking wilderness. Her second cousin, Carlos, I knew and disliked–a sly, mincing fellow with a face like a mink's. Then there was my old friend, Luigi Verenza, an Italian; and his flirt of a sister, Marcita, making eyes at the men as usual. Then there was a short, stocky German who called himself Baron von Schiller; and Jean Desmarte, an out-at-the-elbows nobleman of Gascony; and Don Florenzo de Seville, a lean, dark, silent man, who called himself a Spaniard and wore a rapier nearly as long as himself.

There were others, men and women, but it was long ago and all their names and faces I do not remember.

But there was one man whose face somehow drew my gaze as an alchemist's magnet draws steel. He was a leanly built man of slightly more than medium height, dressed plainly, almost austerely, and he wore a sword almost as long as the Spaniard's.

But it was neither his clothes nor his sword which attracted my attention. It was his face. A refined, high-bred face, it was furrowed deep with lines that gave it a weary, haggard expression. Tiny scars flecked jaw and forehead as if torn by savage claws; I could have sworn the narrow gray eyes had a fleeting, haunted look in their expression at times.

I leaned over to that flirt, Marcita, and asked the name of the man, as it had slipt my mind that we had been introduced.

"De Montour, from Normandy," she answered. "A strange man. I don't think I like him."

“Then he resists your snares, my little enchantress?” I murmured, long friendship making me as immune from her anger as from her wiles. But she chose not to be angry and answered coyly, glancing from under demurely lowered lashes.

I watched de Montour much, feeling somehow a strange fascination. He ate lightly, drank much, seldom spoke, and then only to answer questions.

Presently, toasts making the rounds, I noticed his companions urging him to rise and give a health. At first he refused, then rose, upon their repeated urgings, and stood silent for a moment, goblet raised. He seemed to dominate, to overawe the group of revelers. Then with a mocking, savage laugh, he lifted the goblet above his head.

“To Solomon,” he exclaimed, “who bound all devils! And thrice cursed be he for that some escaped!”

A toast and a curse in one! It was drunk silently, and with many sidelong, doubting glances.

That night I retired early, weary of the long sea voyage and my head spinning from the strength of the wine, of which Dom Vincente kept such great stores.

My room was near the top of the castle and looked out toward the forests of the south and the river. The room was furnished in crude, barbaric splendor, as was all the rest of the castle.

Going to the window, I gazed out at the arquebusier pacing the castle grounds just inside the palisade; at the cleared space lying unsightly and barren in the moonlight; at the forest beyond; at the silent river.

From the native quarters close to the river bank came the weird twanging of some rude lute, sounding a barbaric melody.

In the dark shadows of the forest some uncanny night-bird lifted a mocking voice. A thousand minor notes sounded–birds, and beasts, and the devil knows what else! Some great jungle cat began a hair-lifting yowling. I

shrugged my shoulders and turned from the windows. Surely devils lurked in those somber depths.

There came a knock at my door and I opened it, to admit de Montour.

He strode to the window and gazed at the moon, which rode resplendent and glorious.

“The moon is almost full, is it not, *Monsieur*?” he remarked, turning to me. I nodded, and I could have sworn that he shuddered.

“Your pardon, *Monsieur*. I will not annoy you further.” He turned to go, but at the door turned and retraced his steps.

“*Monsieur*,” he almost whispered, with a fierce intensity, “whatever you do, be sure you bar and bolt your door tonight!”

Then he was gone, leaving me to stare after him bewilderedly.

I dozed off to sleep, the distant shouts of the revelers in my ears, and though I was weary, or perhaps because of it, I slept lightly. While I never really awoke until morning, sounds and noises seemed to drift to me through my veil of slumber, and once it seemed that something was prying and shoving against the bolted door.

As is to be supposed, most of the guests were in a beastly humor the following day and remained in their rooms most of the morning or else straggled down late. Besides Dom Vincente there were really only three of the masculine members sober: de Montour; the Spaniard, de Seville (as he called himself); and myself. The Spaniard never touched wine, and though de Montour consumed incredible quantities of it, it never affected him in any way.

The ladies greeted us most graciously.

“S’truth, *Signor*,” remarked that minx Marcita, giving me her hand with a gracious air that was like to make me snicker, “I am glad to see there are

gentlemen among us who care more for our company than for the wine cup; for most of them are most surprizingly befuddled this morning."

Then with a most outrageous turning of her wondrous eyes, "Methinks someone was too drunk to be discreet last night–or not drunk enough. For unless my poor senses deceive me much, someone came fumbling at my door late in the night."

"Ha!" I exclaimed in quick anger, "some–!"

"No. Hush." She glanced about as if to see that we were alone, then: "Is it not strange that *Signor* de Montour, before he retired last night, instructed me to fasten my door firmly?"

"Strange," I murmured, but did not tell her that he had told me the same thing.

"And is it not strange, Pierre, that though *Signor* de Montour left the banquet hall even before you did, yet he has the appearance of one who has been up all night?"

I shrugged. A woman's fancies are often strange.

"Tonight," she said roguishly, "I will leave my door unbolted and see whom I catch."

"You will do no such thing."

She showed her little teeth in a contemptuous smile and displayed a small, wicked dagger.

"Listen, imp. De Montour gave me the same warning he did you. Whatever he knew, whoever prowled the halls last night, the object was more apt murder than amorous adventure. Keep you your doors bolted. The lady Ysabel shares your room, does she not?"

"Not she. And I send my woman to the slave quarters at night," she murmured, gazing mischievously at me from beneath drooping eyelids.

“One would think you a girl of no character from your talk,” I told her, with the frankness of youth and of long friendship. “Walk with care, young lady, else I tell your brother to spank you.”

And I walked away to pay my respects to Ysabel. The Portuguese girl was the very opposite of Marcita, being a shy, modest young thing, not so beautiful as the Italian, but exquisitely pretty in an appealing, almost childish air. I once had thoughts–Hi ho! To be young and foolish!

Your pardon, *Messieurs*. An old man’s mind wanders. It was of de Montour that I meant to tell you–de Montour and Dom Vincente’s mink-faced cousin.

A band of armed natives were thronged about the gates, kept at a distance by the Portuguese soldiers.

Among them were some score of young men and women all naked, chained neck to neck. Slaves they were, captured by some warlike tribe and brought for sale. Dom Vincente looked them over personally.

Followed a long haggling and bartering, of which I quickly wearied and turned away, wondering that a man of Dom Vincente’s rank could so demean himself as to stoop to trade.

But I strolled back when one of the natives of the village near by came up and interrupted the sale with a long harangue to Dom Vincente.

While they talked de Montour came up, and presently Dom Vincente turned to us and said, “One of the woodcutters of the village was torn to pieces by a leopard or some such beast last night. A strong young man and unmarried.”

“A leopard? Did they see it?” suddenly asked de Montour, and when Dom Vincente said no, that it came and went in the night, de Montour lifted a trembling hand and drew it across his forehead, as if to brush away cold sweat.

“Look you, Pierre,” quoth Dom Vincente, “I have here a slave who, wonder of wonders, desires to be your man. Though the devil only knows why.”

He led up a slim young Jakri, a mere youth, whose main asset seemed a merry grin.

“He is yours,” said Dom Vincente. “He is goodly trained and will make a fine servant. And look ye, a slave is of an advantage over a servant, for all he requires is food and a loincloth or so with a touch of the whip to keep him in his place.”

It was not long before I learned why Gola wished to be “my man,” choosing me among all the rest. It was because of my hair. Like many dandies of that day, I wore it long and curled, the strands falling to my shoulders. As it happened, I was the only man of the party who so wore my hair, and Gola would sit and gaze at it in silent admiration for hours at a time, or until, growing nervous under his unblinking scrutiny, I would boot him forth.

It was that night that a brooding animosity, hardly apparent, between Baron von Schiller and Jean Desmarte broke out into a flame.

As usual, woman was the cause. Marcita carried on a most outrageous flirtation with both of them.

That was not wise. Desmarte was a wild young fool. Von Schiller was a lustful beast. But when, *Messieurs*, did woman ever use wisdom?

Their hate flamed to a murderous fury when the German sought to kiss Marcita.

Swords were clashing in an instant. But before Dom Vincente could thunder a command to halt, Luigi was between the combatants, and had beaten their swords down, hurling them back viciously.

“*Signori*,” said he, softly, but with a fierce intensity, “is it the part of high-bred *signori* to fight over my sister? Ha, by the toe-nails of Satan, for the toss of a coin I would call you both out! You, Marcita, go to your chamber, instantly, nor leave until I give you permission.”

And she went, for, independent though she was, none cared to face the slim, effeminate-appearing youth when a tigerish snarl curled his lips, a murderous gleam lightened his dark eyes.

Apologies were made, but from the glances the two rivals threw at each other, we knew that the quarrel was not forgotten and would blaze forth again at the slightest pretext.

Late that night I woke suddenly with a strange, eery feeling of horror. Why, I could not say. I rose, saw that the door was firmly bolted, and seeing Gola asleep on the floor, kicked him awake irritably.

And just as he got up, hastily, rubbing himself, the silence was broken by a wild scream, a scream that rang through the castle and brought a startled shout from the arquebusier pacing the palisade; a scream from the mouth of a girl, frenzied with terror.

Gola squawked and dived behind the divan. I jerked the door open and raced down the dark corridor.

Dashing down a winding stair, I caromed into someone at the bottom and we tumbled headlong.

He gasped something and I recognized the voice of Jean Desmarte. I hauled him to his feet, and raced along, he following; the screams had ceased, but the whole castle was in an uproar, voices shouting, the clank of weapons, lights flashing up, Dom Vincente’s voice shouting for the soldiers, the noise of armed men rushing through the rooms and falling over each other. With all the confusion, Desmarte, the Spaniard, and I reached Marcita’s room just as Luigi darted inside and snatched his sister into his arms.

Others rushed in, carrying lights and weapons, shouting, demanding to know what was occurring.

The girl lay quietly in her brother’s arms, her dark hair loose and rippling over her shoulders, her dainty night-garments torn to shreds and exposing her lovely body. Long scratches showed upon her arms, breasts and shoulders.

Presently she opened her eyes, shuddered, then shrieked wildly and clung frantically to Luigi, begging him not to let something take her.

“The door!” she whimpered. “I left it unbarred. And something crept into my room through the darkness.

I struck at it with my dagger and it hurled me to the floor, tearing, tearing at me. Then I fainted.”

“Where is von Schiller?” asked the Spaniard, a fierce glint in his dark eyes. Every man glanced at his neighbor. All the guests were there except the German. I noted de Montour, gazing at the terrified girl, his face more haggard than usual. And I thought it strange that he wore no weapon.

“Aye, von Schiller!” exclaimed Desmarte fiercely. And half of us followed Dom Vincente out into the corridor. We began a vengeful search through the castle, and in a small, dark hallway we found von Schiller. On his face he lay, in a crimson, ever widening stain.

“This is the work of some native!” exclaimed Desmarte, face aghast.

“Nonsense,” bellowed Dom Vincente. “No native from the outside could pass the soldiers. All slaves, von Schiller’s among them, were barred and bolted in the slave quarters, except Gola, who sleeps in Pierre’s room, and Ysabel’s woman.”

“But who else could have done this deed?” exclaimed Desmarte in a fury.

“You!” I said abruptly; “else why ran you so swiftly away from the room of Marcita?”

“Curse you, you lie!” he shouted, and his swift-drawn sword leaped for my breast; but quick as he was, the Spaniard was quicker. Desmarte’s rapier clattered against the wall and Desmarte stood like a statue, the Spaniard’s motionless point just touching his throat.

“Bind him,” said the Spaniard without passion.

“Put down your blade, Don Florenzo,” commanded Dom Vincente, striding forward and dominating the scene. “*Signor* Desmarte, you are one of my best friends, but I am the only law here and duty must be done. Give your word that you will not seek to escape.”

“I give it,” replied the Gascon calmly. “I acted hastily. I apologize. I was not intentionally running away, but the halls and corridors of this cursed castle confuse me.”

Of us all, probably but one man believed him.

“*Messieurs*!” De Montour stepped forward. “This youth is not guilty. Turn the German over.”

Two soldiers did as he asked. De Montour shuddered, pointing. The rest of us glanced once, then recoiled in horror.

“Could man have done that thing?”

“With a dagger–” began someone.

“No dagger makes wounds like that,” said the Spaniard. “The German was torn to pieces by the talons of some frightful beast.”

We glanced about us, half expecting some hideous monster to leap upon us from the shadows.

We searched that castle; every foot, every inch of it. And we found no trace of any beast.

Dawn was breaking when I returned to my room, to find that Gola had barred himself in; and it took me nearly a half-hour to convince him to let me in.

Having smacked him soundly and berated him for his cowardice, I told him what had taken place, as he could understand French and could speak a weird mixture which he proudly called French.

His mouth gaped and only the whites of his eyes showed as the tale reached its climax.

“Ju ju!” he whispered fearsomely. “Fetish man!”

Suddenly an idea came to me. I had heard vague tales, little more than hints of legends, of the devilish leopard cult that existed on the West Coast. No white man had ever seen one of its votaries, but Dom Vincente had told us tales of beast-men, disguised in skins of leopards, who stole through the midnight jungle and slew and devoured. A ghastly thrill traveled up and down my spine and in an instant I had Gola in a grasp which made him yell.

“Was that a leopard-man?” I hissed, shaking him viciously.

“Massa, massa!” he gasped. “Me good boy! Ju ju man get! More besser no tell!”

“You’ll tell me!” I gritted, renewing my endeavors, until, his hands waving feeble protests, he promised to tell me what he knew.

“No leopard-man!” he whispered, and his eyes grew big with supernatural fear. “Moon, he full, woodcutter find, him heap clawed. Find ’nother woodcutter. Big Massa (Dom Vincente) say, ‘leopard.’

No leopard. But leopard-man, he come to kill. *Something kill leopard-man!* Heap claw! Hai, hai!

Moon full again. Something come in lonely hut; claw um woman, claw um pick’n in. Man find um claw up. Big Massa say ‘leopard.’ Full moon again, and woodcutter find, heap clawed. Now come in castle.

No leopard. *But always footmarks of a man! ”*

I gave a startled, incredulous exclamation.

It was true, Gola averred. Always the footprints of a man led away from the scene of the murder. Then why did the natives not tell the Big Massa that he might hunt down the fiend? Here Gola assumed a crafty expression and whispered in my ear, *“The footprints were of a man who wore shoes!”*

Even assuming that Gola was lying, I felt a thrill of unexplainable horror. Who, then, did the natives believe was doing these frightful murders?

And he answered: Dom Vincente!

By this time, *Messieurs*, my mind was in a whirl.

What was the meaning of all this? Who slew the German and sought to ravish Marcita? And as I reviewed the crime, it appeared to me that murder rather than rape was the object of the attack.

Why did de Montour warn us, and then appear to have knowledge of the crime, telling us that Desmarte was innocent and then proving it?

It was all beyond me.

The tale of the slaughter got among the natives, in spite of all we could do, and they appeared restless and nervous, and thrice that day Dom Vincente had a black lashed for insolence. A brooding atmosphere pervaded the castle.

I considered going to Dom Vincente with Gola's tale, but decided to wait awhile.

The women kept their chambers that day, the men were restless and moody. Dom Vincente announced that the sentries would be doubled and some would patrol the corridors of the castle itself. I found myself musing cynically that if Gola's suspicions were true, sentries would be of little good.

I am not, *Messieurs*, a man to brook such a situation with patience. And I was young then. So as we drank before retiring, I flung my goblet on the table and angrily announced that in spite of man, beast or devil, I slept that night with doors flung wide. And I tramped angrily to my chamber.

Again, as on the first night, de Montour came. And his face was as a man who has looked into the gaping gates of hell.

“I have come,” he said, “to ask you–nay, *Monsieur*, to implore you–to reconsider your rash determination.”

I shook my head impatiently.

“You are resolved? Yes? Then I ask you to do this for me, that after I enter my chamber, you will bolt my doors from the outside.”

I did as he asked, and then made my way back to my chamber, my mind in a maze of wonderment. I had sent Gola to the slave quarters, and I laid rapier and dagger close at hand. Nor did I go to bed, but crouched in a great chair, in the darkness. Then I had much ado to keep from sleeping. To keep myself awake, I fell to musing on the strange words of de Montour. He seemed to be laboring under great excitement; his eyes hinted of ghastly mysteries known to him alone. And yet his face was not that of a wicked man.

Suddenly the notion took me to go to his chamber and talk with him.

Walking those dark passages was a shuddersome task, but eventually I stood before de Montour’s door. I called softly. Silence. I reached out a hand and felt splintered fragments of wood. Hastily I struck flint and steel which I carried, and the flaming tinder showed the great oaken door sagging on its mighty hinges; showed a door smashed and splintered *from the inside*. And the chamber of de Montour was unoccupied.

Some instinct prompted me to hurry back to my room, swiftly but silently, shoeless feet treading softly.

And as I neared the door, I was aware of something in the darkness before me. Something which crept in from a side corridor and glided stealthily along.

In a wild panic of fear I leaped, striking wildly and aimlessly in the darkness. My clenched fist encountered a human head, and something went down with a crash. Again I struck a light; a man lay senseless on the floor, and he was de Montour.

I thrust a candle into a niche in the wall, and just then de Montour's eyes opened and he rose uncertainly.

"You!" I exclaimed, hardly knowing what I said. "You, of all men!"

He merely nodded.

"You killed von Schiller?"

"Yes."

I recoiled with a gasp of horror.

"Listen." He raised his hand. "Take your rapier and run me through. No man will touch you."

"No," I exclaimed. "I can not."

"Then, quick," he said hurriedly, "get into your chamber and bolt the door. Haste! It will return!"

"What will return?" I asked, with a thrill of horror. "If it will harm me, it will harm you. Come into the chamber with me."

"No, no!" he fairly shrieked, springing back from my outstretched arm. "Haste, haste! It left me for an instant, but it will return." Then in a low-pitched voice of indescribable horror: "It is returning. *It is here now!* "

And I felt a *something*, a formless, shapeless presence near. A thing of frightfulness.

De Montour was standing, legs braced, arms thrown back, fists clenched. The muscles bulged beneath his skin, his eyes widened and narrowed, the veins stood out upon his forehead as if in great physical effort. As I looked, to my horror, out of nothing, a shapeless, nameless *something* took vague form!

Like a shadow it moved upon de Montour.

It was hovering about him! Good God, it was merging, becoming one with the man!

De Montour swayed; a great gasp escaped him. The dim thing vanished. De Montour wavered. Then he turned toward me, and may God grant that I never look on a face like that again!

It was a hideous, a bestial face. The eyes gleamed with a frightful ferocity; the snarling lips were drawn back from gleaming teeth, which to my startled gaze appeared more like bestial fangs than human teeth.

Silently the *thing* (I can not call it a human) slunk toward me. Gasping with horror I sprang back and through the door, just as the *thing* launched itself through the air, with a sinuous motion which even then made me think of a leaping wolf. I slammed the door, holding it against the frightful *thing* which hurled itself again and again against it.

Finally it desisted and I heard it slink stealthily off down the corridor. Faint and exhausted I sat down, waiting, listening. Through the open window wafted the breeze, bearing all the scents of Africa, the spicy and the foul. From the native village came the sound of a native drum. Other drums answered farther up the river and back in the bush. Then from somewhere in the jungle, horridly incongruous, sounded the long, high-pitched call of a timber wolf. My soul revolted.

Dawn brought a tale of terrified villagers, of a negro woman torn by some fiend of the night, barely escaping. And to de Montour I went.

On the way I met Dom Vincente. He was perplexed and angry.

“Some hellish thing is at work in this castle,” he said. “Last night, though I have said naught of it to anyone, something leaped upon the back of one of the arquebusiers, tore the leather jerkin from his shoulders and pursued him to the barbican. More, someone locked de Montour into his room last night, and he was forced to smash the door to get out.”

He strode on, muttering to himself, and I proceeded down the stairs, more puzzled than ever.

De Montour sat upon a stool, gazing out the window. An indescribable air of weariness was about him.

His long hair was uncombed and tousled, his garments were tattered. With a shudder I saw faint crimson stains upon his hands, and noted that the nails were torn and broken.

He looked up as I came in, and waved me to a seat. His face was worn and haggard, but was that of a man.

After a moment's silence, he spoke.

"I will tell you my strange tale. Never before has it passed my lips, and why I tell you, knowing that you will not believe me, I can not say."

And then I listened to what was surely the wildest, the most fantastic, the weirdest tale ever heard by man.

"Years ago," said de Montour, "I was upon a military mission in northern France. Alone, I was forced to pass through the fiend-haunted woodlands of Villefère. In those frightful forests I was beset by an inhuman, a ghastly *thing*–a werewolf. Beneath a midnight moon we fought, and I slew it. Now this is the truth: that if a werewolf is slain in the half-form of a man, its ghost will haunt its slayer through eternity. But if it is slain as a wolf, hell gapes to receive it. The true werewolf is not (as many think) a man who may take the form of a wolf, *but a wolf who takes the form of a man!*

"Now listen, my friend, and I will tell you of the wisdom, the hellish knowledge that is mine, gained through many a frightful deed, imparted to me amid the ghastly shadows of midnight forests where fiends and half-beasts roamed.

"In the beginning, the world was strange, misshapen. Grotesque beasts wandered through its jungles.

Driven from another world, ancient demons and fiends came in great numbers and settled upon this newer, younger world. Long the forces of good and evil warred.

“A strange beast, known as man, wandered among the other beasts, and since good or bad must have a concrete form ere either accomplishes its desire, the spirits of good entered man. The fiends entered other beast, reptiles and birds; and long and fiercely waged the age-old battle. But man conquered. The great dragons and serpents were slain and with them the demons. Finally, Solomon, wise beyond the ken of man, made great war upon them, and by virtue of his wisdom, slew, seized and bound. But there were some which were the fiercest, the boldest, and though Solomon drove them out he could not conquer them. Those had taken the form of wolves. As the ages passed, wolf and demon became merged. No longer could the fiend leave the body of the wolf at will. In many instances, the savagery of the wolf overcame the subtlety of the demon and enslaved him, so the wolf became again only a beast, a fierce, cunning beast, but merely a beast. But of the werewolves, there are many, even yet.

“And during the time of the full moon, the wolf may take the form, or the half-form, of a man. When the moon hovers at her zenith, however, the wolf-spirit again takes ascendancy and the werewolf becomes a true wolf once more. But if it is slain in the form of a man, then the spirit is free to haunt its slayer through the ages.

“Harken now. I had thought to have slain the *thing* after it had changed to its true shape. But I slew it an instant too soon. The moon, though it approached the zenith, had not yet reached it, nor had the *thing* taken on fully the wolf-form.

“Of this I knew nothing and went my way. But when the next time approached for the full moon, I began to be aware of a strange, malicious influence. An atmosphere of horror hovered in the air and I was aware of inexplicable, uncanny impulses.

“One night in a small village in the center of a great forest, the influence came upon me with full power. It was night, and the moon, nearly full, was rising over the forest. And between the moon and me, I saw, floating in the upper air, ghostly and barely discernible, *the outline of a wolf’s head!*

“I remember little of what happened thereafter. I remember, dimly, clambering into the silent street, remember struggling, resisting briefly,

vainly, and the rest is a crimson maze, until I came to myself the next morning and found my garments and hands caked and stained crimson; and heard the horrified chattering of the villagers, telling of a pair of clandestine lovers, slaughtered in a ghastly manner, scarcely outside the village, torn to pieces as if by wild beasts, as if by wolves.

“From that village I fled aghast, but I fled not alone. In the day I could not feel the drive of my fearful captor, but when night fell and the moon rose, I ranged the silent forest, a frightful thing, a slayer of humans, a fiend in a man’s body.

“God, the battles I have fought! But always it overcame me and drove me ravening after some new victim. But after the moon had passed its fullness, the thing’s power over me ceased suddenly. Nor did it return until three nights before the moon was full again.

“Since then I have roamed the world–fleeing, fleeing, seeking to escape. Always the *thing* follows, taking possession of my body when the moon is full. Gods, the frightful deeds I have done!

“I would have slain myself long ago but I dare not. For the soul of a suicide is accurst, and my soul would be forever hunted through the flames of hell. And harken, most frightful of all, my slain body would forever roam the earth, moved and inhabited by the soul of the werewolf! Can any thought be more ghastly?

“And I seem immune to the weapons of man. Swords have pierced me, daggers have hacked me. I am covered with scars. Yet never have they struck me down. In Germany they bound and led me to the block. There would I have willingly placed my head, but the *thing* came upon me, and breaking my bonds, I slew and fled. Up and down the world I have wandered, leaving horror and slaughter in my trail.

Chains, cells, can not hold me. The *thing* is fastened to me through all eternity.

“In desperation I accepted Dom Vincente’s invitation, for look you, none knows of my frightful double life, since no one could recognize me in the

clutch of the demon; and few, seeing me, live to tell of it.

“My hands are red, my soul doomed to everlasting flames, my mind is torn with remorse for my crimes.

And yet I can do nothing to help myself. Surely, Pierre, no man ever knew the hell that I have known.

“Yes, I slew von Schiller, and I sought to destroy the girl, Marcita. Why I did not, I can not say, for I have slain both women and men.

“Now, if you will, take your sword and slay me, and with my last breath I will give you the good God’s blessing. No?

“You know now my tale and you see before you a man, fiend-haunted for all eternity.”

My mind was spinning with wonderment as I left the room of de Montour. What to do, I knew not. It seemed likely that he would yet murder us all, and yet I could not bring myself to tell Dom Vincente all.

From the bottom of my soul I pitied de Montour.

So I kept my peace, and in the days that followed I made occasion to seek him out and converse with him. A real friendship sprang up between us.

About this time that black devil, Gola, began to wear an air of suppressed excitement, as if he knew something he wished desperately to tell, but would not or else dared not.

So the days passed in feasting, drinking and hunting, until one night de Montour came to my chamber and pointed silently at the moon which was just rising.

“Look ye,” he said, “I have a plan. I will give it out that I am going into the jungle for hunting and will go forth, apparently for several days. But at night I will return to the castle, and you must lock me into the dungeon which is used as a storeroom.”

This we did, and I managed to slip down twice a day and carry food and drink to my friend. He insisted on remaining in the dungeon even in the day, for though the fiend had never exerted its influence over him in the daytime, and he believed it powerless then, yet he would take no chances.

It was during this time that I began to notice that Dom Vincente's mink-faced cousin, Carlos, was forcing his attentions upon Ysabel, who was his second cousin, and who seemed to resent those attentions.

Myself, I would have challenged him for a duel for the toss of a coin, for I despised him, but it was really none of my affair. However, it seemed that Ysabel feared him.

My friend Luigi, by the way, had become enamored of the dainty Portuguese girl, and was making swift love to her daily.

And de Montour sat in his cell and reviewed his ghastly deeds until he battered the bars with his bare hands.

And Don Florenzo wandered about the castle grounds like a dour Mephistopheles.

And the other guests rode and quarreled and drank.

And Gola slithered about, eyeing me as if always on the point of imparting momentous information. What wonder if my nerves became rasped to the shrieking point?

Each day the natives grew surlier and more and more sullen and intractable.

One night, not long before the full of the moon, I entered the dungeon where de Montour sat.

He looked up quickly.

"You dare much, coming to me in the night."

I shrugged my shoulders, seating myself.

A small barred window let in the night scents and sounds of Africa.

“Hark to the native drums,” I said. “For the past week they have sounded almost incessantly.”

De Montour assented.

“The natives are restless. Methinks ’tis deviltry they are planning. Have you noticed that Carlos is much among them?”

“No,” I answered, “but ’tis like there will be a break between him and Luigi. Luigi is paying court to Ysabel.”

So we talked, when suddenly de Montour became silent and moody, answering only in monosyllables.

The moon rose and peered in at the barred windows. De Montour’s face was illuminated by its beams.

And then the hand of horror grasped me. On the wall behind de Montour appeared a shadow, a shadow clearly defined of a *wolf’s head!*

At the same instant de Montour felt its influence. With a shriek he bounded from his stool.

He pointed fiercely, and as with trembling hands I slammed and bolted the door behind me, I felt him hurl his weight against it. As I fled up the stairway I heard a wild raving and battering at the iron-bound door.

But with all the werewolf ’s might the great door held.

As I entered my room, Gola dashed in and gasped out the tale he had been keeping for days.

I listened, incredulously, and then dashed forth to find Dom Vincente.

I was told that Carlos had asked him to accompany him to the village to arrange a sale of slaves.

My informer was Don Florenzo of Seville, and when I gave him a brief outline of Gola's tale, he accompanied me.

Together we dashed through the castle gate, flinging a word to the guards, and down the landing toward the village.

Dom Vincente, Dom Vincente, walk with care, keep sword loosened in its sheath! Fool, fool, to walk in the night with Carlos, the traitor!

They were nearing the village when we caught up with them. "Dom Vincente!" I exclaimed; "return instantly to the castle. Carlos is selling you into the hands of the natives! Gola has told me that he lusts for your wealth and for Ysabel! A terrified native babbled to him of booted footprints near the places where the woodcutters were murdered, and Carlos has made the blacks believe that the slayer was you!

Tonight the natives were to rise and slay every man in the castle except Carlos! Do you not believe me, Dom Vincente?"

"Is this truth, Carlos?" asked Dom Vincente, in amaze.

Carlos laughed mockingly.

"The fool speaks truth," he said, "but it accomplishes you nothing. Ho!"

He shouted as he leaped for Dom Vincente. Steel flashed in the moonlight and the Spaniard's sword was through Carlos ere he could move.

And the shadows rose about us. Then it was back to back, sword and dagger, three men against a hundred. Spears flashed, and a fiendish yell went up from savage throats. I spitted three natives in as many thrusts and then went down from a stunning swing from a war-club, and an instant later Dom Vincente fell upon me, with a spear in one arm and another through the leg. Don Florenzo was standing above us, sword leaping like a living thing, when a charge of the arquebusiers swept the river bank clear and we were borne into the castle.

The black hordes came with a rush, spears flashing like a wave of steel, a thunderous roar of savagery going up to the skies.

Time and again they swept up the slopes, bounding the moat, until they were swarming over the palisades. And time and again the fire of the hundred-odd defenders hurled them back.

They had set fire to the plundered warehouses, and their light vied with the light of the moon. Just across the river there was a larger storehouse, and about this hordes of the natives gathered, tearing it apart for plunder.

“Would that they would drop torch upon it,” said Dom Vincente, “for naught is stored therein save some thousand pounds of gunpowder. I dared not store the treacherous stuff this side the river. All the tribes of the river and coast have gathered for our slaughter and all my ships are upon the seas.

“We may hold out awhile, but eventually they will swarm the palisade and put us to the slaughter.”

I hastened to the dungeon wherein de Montour sat. Outside the door I called to him and he bade me enter in voice which told me the fiend had left him for an instant.

“The blacks have risen,” I told him.

“I guessed as much. How goes the battle?”

I gave him the details of the betrayal and the fight, and mentioned the powder-house across the river. He sprang to his feet.

“Now by my hag-ridden soul!” he exclaimed; “I will fling the dice once more with hell! Swift, let me out of the castle! I will essay to swim the river and set off yon powder!”

“It is insanity!” I exclaimed. “A thousand blacks lurk between the palisades and the river, and thrice that number beyond! The river itself swarms with crocodiles!”

“I will attempt it!” he answered, a great light in his face. “If I can reach it, some thousand natives will lighten the siege; if I am slain, then my soul is free and mayhap will gain some forgiveness for that I gave my life to atone for my crimes.”

Then, “Haste,” he exclaimed, “for the demon is returning! Already I feel his influence! Haste ye!”

For the castle gates we sped, and as de Montour ran he gasped as a man in a terrific battle.

At the gate he pitched headlong, then rose, to spring through it. Wild yells greeted him from the natives.

The arquebusiers shouted curses at him and at me. Peering down from the top of the palisades I saw him turn from side to side uncertainly. A score of natives were rushing recklessly forward, spears raised.

Then the eery wolf-yell rose to the skies, and de Montour bounded forward. Aghast, the natives paused, and before a man of them could move he was among them. Wild shrieks, not of rage, but of terror.

In amazement the arquebusiers held their fire.

Straight through the group of blacks de Montour charged, and when they broke and fled, three of them fled not.

A dozen steps de Montour took in pursuit; then stopped stock-still. A moment he stood so, while spears flew about him, then turned and ran swiftly in the direction of the river.

A few steps from the river another band of blacks barred his way. In the flaming light of the burning houses the scene was clearly illuminated. A thrown spear tore through de Montour’s shoulder. Without pausing in his stride he tore it forth and drove it through a native, leaping over his body to get among the others.

They could not face the fiend-driven white man. With shrieks they fled, and de Montour, bounding upon the back of one, brought him down.

Then he rose, staggered and sprang to the river bank. An instant he paused there and then vanished in the shadows.

“Name of the devil!” gasped Dom Vincente at my shoulder. “What manner of man is that? Was that de Montour?”

I nodded. The wild yells of the natives rose above the crackle of the arquebus fire. They were massed thick about the great warehouse across the river.

“They plan a great rush,” said Dom Vincente. “They will swarm clear over the palisade, methinks. Ha!”

A crash that seemed to rip the skies apart! A burst of flame that mounted to the stars! The castle rocked with the explosion. Then silence, as the smoke, drifting away, showed only a great crater where the warehouse had stood.

I could tell of how Dom Vincente led a charge, crippled as he was, out of the castle gate and down the slope, to fall upon the terrified blacks who had escaped the explosion. I could tell of the slaughter, of the victory and the pursuit of the fleeing natives.

I could tell, too, *Messieurs*, of how I became separated from the band and of how I wandered far into the jungle, unable to find my way back to the coast.

I could tell how I was captured by a wandering band of slave raiders, and of how I escaped. But such is not my intention. In itself it would make a long tale; and it is of de Montour that I am speaking.

I thought much of the things that had passed and wondered if indeed de Montour reached the storehouse to blow it to the skies or whether it was but the deed of chance.

That a man could swim that reptile-swarming river, fiend-driven though he was, seemed impossible. And if he blew up the storehouse, he must have

gone up with it.

So one night I pushed my way wearily through the jungle and sighted the coast, and close to the shore a small, tumble-down hut of thatch. To it I went, thinking to sleep therein if insects and reptiles would allow.

I entered the doorway and then stopped short. Upon a makeshift stool sat a man. He looked up as I entered and the rays of the moon fell across his face.

I started back with a ghastly thrill of horror. *It was de Montour, and the moon was full!*

Then as I stood, unable to flee, he rose and came toward me. And his face, though haggard as of a man who has looked into hell, was the face of a sane man.

“Come in, my friend,” he said, and there was a great peace in his voice. “Come in and fear me not. The fiend has left me forever.”

“But tell me, how conquered you?” I exclaimed as I grasped his hand.

“I fought a frightful battle, as I ran to the river,” he answered, “for the fiend had me in its grasp and drove me to fall upon the natives. But for the first time my soul and mind gained ascendancy for an instant, an instant just long enough to hold me to my purpose. And I believe the good saints came to my aid, for I was giving my life to save life.

“I leaped into the river and swam, and in an instant the crocodiles were swarming about me.

“Again in the clutch of the fiend I fought them, there in the river. Then suddenly the *thing* left me.

“I climbed from the river and fired the warehouse. The explosion hurled me hundreds of feet, and for days I wandered witless through the jungle.

“But the full moon came, and came again, and I felt not the influence of the fiend.

“I am free, free!” And a wondrous note of exultation, nay, *exaltation*, thrilled his words:

“My soul is free. Incredible as it seems, the demon lies drowned upon the bed of the river, or else inhabits the body of one of the savage reptiles that swim the ways of the Niger.”

Up, John Kane!

Up, John Kane, the grey night’s falling;

The sun’s sunk in blood and the fog comes crawling;

From hillside to hill the grey wolves are calling;

Will ye come, will ye come, John Kane?

What of the oath that you swore by the river

Where the black shadows lurk and the sun comes never,

And a Shape in the shadows wags its grisly head forever?

You swore by the blood-crust that stained your dagger,

By the haunted woods where hoofed feet swagger,

And under grisly burdens misshapen creatures stagger.

Up, John Kane, and cease your quaking!

You have made the pact which has no breaking,

And your brothers are eager their thirst to be slaking.

Up, John Kane! Why cringe there, and cower?

The pact was sealed with the dark blood-flower;

Glut now your fill in the werewolf ’s hour!

Fear not the night nor the shadows that play there;

Soundless and sure shall your bare feet stray there;

Strong shall your teeth be, to rend and to slay there.

Up, John Kane, the thick night’s falling;

Up from the valleys the white fog’s crawling;

Your four-footed brothers from the hills are calling:

Will ye come, will ye come, John Kane?

Remembrance

Eight thousand years ago a man I slew;

I lay in wait beside a sparkling rill

There in an upland valley green and still.

The white stream gurgled where the rushes grew;

The hills were veiled in dreamy hazes blue.

He came along the trail; with savage skill

My spear leaped like a snake to make my kill–

Leaped like a striking snake and pierced him through.

And still when blue haze dreams along the sky

And breezes bring the murmur of the sea,

A whisper thrills me where at ease I lie

Beneath the branches of some mountain tree;

He comes, fog-dim, the ghost that will not die,

And with accusing finger points at me.

The Dream Snake

The night was strangely still. As we sat upon the wide veranda, gazing out over the broad, shadowy lawns, the silence of the hour entered our spirits and for a long while no one spoke.

Then far across the dim mountains that fringed the eastern skyline, a faint haze began to glow, and presently a great golden moon came up, making a ghostly radiance over the land and etching boldly the dark clumps of shadows that were trees. A light breeze came whispering out of the east, and the unmowed grass swayed before it in long, sinuous waves, dimly visible in the moonlight; and from among the group upon the veranda there came a swift gasp, a sharp intake of breath that caused us all to turn and gaze.

Faming was leaning forward, clutching the arms of his chair, his face strange and pallid in the spectral light; a thin trickle of blood seeping from the lip in which he had set his teeth. Amazed, we looked at him, and suddenly he jerked about with a short, snarling laugh.

“There’s no need of gawking at me like a flock of sheep!” he said irritably and stopped short. We sat bewildered, scarcely knowing what sort of reply to make, and suddenly he burst out again.

“Now I guess I’d better tell the whole thing or you’ll be going off and putting me down as a lunatic. Don’t interrupt me, any of you! I want to get this thing off my mind. You all know that I’m not a very imaginative man; but there’s a thing, purely a figment of imagination, that has haunted me since babyhood.

A dream!” He fairly cringed back in his chair as he muttered, “A dream! and God, what a dream! The first time–no, I can’t remember the first time I ever dreamed it–I’ve been dreaming the hellish thing ever since I can

remember. Now it’s this way: there is a sort of bungalow, set upon a hill in the midst of wide grasslands–not unlike this estate; but this scene is in Africa. And I am living there with a sort of servant, a Hindoo. Just why I am there is never clear to my waking mind, though I am always aware of the reason in my dreams. As a man of a dream, I remember my past life (a life which in no way corresponds with my waking life), but when I am awake my subconscious mind fails to transmit these impressions.

However, I think that I am a fugitive from justice and the Hindoo is also a fugitive. How the bungalow came to be there I can never remember, nor do I know in what part of Africa it is, though all these things are known to my dream self. But the bungalow is a small one of a very few rooms, and is situated upon the top of the hill, as I said. There are no other hills about and the grasslands stretch to the horizon in every direction; knee-high in some places, waist-high in others.

“Now the dream always opens as I am coming up the hill, just as the sun is beginning to set. I am carrying a broken rifle and I have been on a hunting trip; how the rifle was broken, and the full details of the trip, I clearly remember–dreaming. But never upon waking. It is just as if a curtain were suddenly raised and a drama began; or just as if I were suddenly transferred to another man’s body and life, remembering past years of that life, and not cognizant of any other existence. And that is the hellish part of it! As you know, most of us, dreaming, are, at the back of our consciousness, aware that we are dreaming. No matter how horrible the dream may become, we know that it is a dream, and thus insanity or possible death is staved off. But in this particular dream, there is no such knowledge. I tell you it is so vivid, so complete in every detail, that I wonder sometimes if that is not my real existence and this a dream! But no; for then I should have been dead years ago.

“As I was saying, I come up the hill and the first thing I am cognizant of that is out of the ordinary is a sort of track leading up the hill in an irregular way; that is, the grass is mashed down as if something heavy had been dragged over it. But I pay no especial attention to it, for I am thinking, with some irritation, that the broken rifle I carry is my only arm and that now I must forego hunting until I can send for another.

“You see, I remember thoughts and impressions of the dream itself, of the occurrences of the dream; it is the memories that the dream ‘I’ has, of that other dream existence that I can not remember. So. I come up the hill and enter the bungalow. The doors are open and the Hindoo is not there. But the main room is in confusion; chairs are broke, a table overturned. The Hindoo’s dagger is lying upon the floor, but there is no blood anywhere.

“Now, in my dreams, I never remember the other dreams, as sometimes one does. Always it is the first dream, the first time. I always experience the same sensations, in my dreams, with as vivid a force as the first time I ever dreamed. So. I am not able to understand this. The Hindoo is gone, but (thus I ruminate, standing in the center of the disordered room) what did away with him? Had it been a raiding party of negroes they would have looted the bungalow and probably burned it. Had it been a lion, the place would have been smeared with blood. Then suddenly I remember the track I saw going up the hill, and a cold hand touches my spine; for instantly the whole thing is clear: the thing that came up from the grasslands and wrought havoc in the little bungalow could be naught else except a giant serpent. And as I think of the size of the spoor, cold sweat beads my forehead and the broken rifle shakes in my hand.

“Then I rush to the door in a wild panic, my only thought to make a dash for the coast. But the sun has set and dusk is stealing across the grasslands. And out there somewhere, lurking in the tall grass is that grisly thing–that horror. God!” The ejaculation broke from his lips with such feeling that all of us started, not realizing the tension we had reached. There was a second’s silence, then he continued:

“So I bolt the doors and windows, light the lamp I have and take my stand in the middle of the room.

And I stand like a statue–waiting–listening. After a while the moon comes up and her haggard light drifts through the windows. And I stand still in the center of the room; the night is very still–something like this night; the breeze occasionally whispers through the grass, and each time I start and clench my hands until the nails bite into the flesh and the blood trickles down my wrists–and I stand there and wait and listen but it does not come

that night!” The sentence came suddenly and explosively, and an involuntary sigh came from the rest; a relaxing of tension.

“I am determined, if I live the night through, to start for the coast early the next morning, taking my chance out there in the grim grasslands–with it. But with morning, I dare not. I do not know in which direction the monster went; and I dare not risk coming upon him in the open, unarmed as I am. So, as in a maze, I remain at the bungalow, and ever my eyes turn toward the sun, lurching relentlessly down the sky toward the horizon. Ah, God! if I could but halt the sun in the sky!”

The man was in the clutch of some terrific power; his words fairly leaped at us.

“Then the sun rocks down the sky and the long gray shadows come stalking across the grasslands. Dizzy with fear, I have bolted the doors and windows and lighted the lamp long before the last faint glow of twilight fades. The light from the windows may attract the monster, but I dare not stay in the dark. And again I take my stand in the center of the room–waiting.”

There was a shuddersome halt. Then he continued, barely above a whisper, moistening his lips: “There is no knowing how long I stand there; Time has ceased to be and each second is an eon; each minute is an eternity stretching into endless eternities. Then, God! but what is that?” he leaned forward, the moonlight etching his face into such a mask of horrified listening that each of us shivered and flung a hasty glance over our shoulders.

“Not the night breeze this time,” he whispered. “Something makes the grasses swish-swish–as if a great, long, pliant weight were being dragged through them. Above the bungalow it swishes and then ceases–in front of the door; then the hinges creak–creak! The door begins to bulge inward–a small bit–then some more!” The man’s arms were held in front of him, as if braced strongly against something, and his breath came in quick gasps. “And I know I should lean against the door and hold it shut, but I do not, I can not move. I stand there, like a sheep waiting to be slaughtered–but the door holds!” Again that sigh expressive of pent-up feeling.

He drew a shaky hand across his brow. “And all night I stand in the center of that room, as motionless as an image, except to turn slowly, as the swish-swish of the grass marks the fiend’s course about the house. Ever I keep my eyes in the direction of that soft, sinister sound. Sometimes it ceases for an instant, or for several minutes, and then I stand scarcely breathing, for a horrible obsession has it that the serpent has in some way made entrance into the bungalow, and I start and whirl this way and that, frightfully fearful of making a noise, though I know not why, but ever with the feeling that the thing is at my back.

Then the sounds commence again and I freeze motionless.

“Now here is the only time that my consciousness, which guides my waking hours, ever in any way pierces the veil of dreams. I am, in the dream, in no way conscious that it is a dream, but, in a detached sort of way, my other mind recognizes certain facts and passes them on to my sleeping–shall I say ‘ego’?

That is to say, my personality is for an instant truly dual and separate to an extent, as the right and left arms are separate, while making up parts in the same entity. My dreaming mind has no cognizance of my higher mind; for the time being the other mind is subordinated and the subconscious mind is in full control, to such an extent that it does not even recognize the existence of the other. But the conscious mind, now sleeping, is cognizant of dim thought-waves emanating from the dream mind. I know that I have not made this entirely clear, but the fact remains that I know that my mind, conscious and subconscious, is near to ruin. My obsession of fear, as I stand there in my dream, is that the serpent will raise itself and peer into the window at me. And I know, in my dream, that if this occurs I shall go insane. And so vivid is the impression imparted to my conscious, now sleeping mind that the thought-waves stir the dim seas of sleep, and somehow I can feel my sanity rocking as my sanity rocks in my dream. Back and forth it totters and sways until the motion takes on a physical aspect and I in my dream am swaying from side to side. Not always is the sensation the same, but I tell you, if that horror ever raises its terrible shape and leers at me, if I ever see the fearful thing in my dream, I shall become stark, wild insane.” There was a restless movement among the rest.

“God! but what a prospect!” he muttered. “To be insane and forever dreaming that same dream, night and day! But there I stand, and centuries go by, but at last a dim gray light begins to steal through the windows, the swishing dies away in the distance and presently a red, haggard sun climbs the eastern sky.

Then I turn about and gaze into a mirror–and my hair has become perfectly white. I stagger to the door and fling it wide. There is nothing in sight but a wide track leading away down the hill through the grasslands–in the opposite direction from that which I would take toward the coast. And with a shriek of maniacal laughter, I dash down the hill and race across the grasslands. I race until I drop from exhaustion, then I lie until I can stagger up and go on.

“All day I keep this up, with superhuman effort, spurred on by the horror behind me. And ever as I hurl myself forward on weakening legs, ever as I lie gasping for breath, I watch the sun with a terrible eagerness. How swiftly the sun travels when a man races it for life! A losing race it is, as I know when I watch the sun sinking toward the skyline, and the hills which I had hoped to gain ere sundown seemingly as far away as ever.”

His voice was lowered and instinctively we leaned toward him; he was gripping the chair arms and the blood was seeping from his lip.

“Then the sun sets and the shadows come and I stagger on and fall and rise and reel on again. And I laugh, laugh, laugh! Then I cease, for the moon comes up and throws the grasslands in ghostly and silvery relief. The light is white across the land, though the moon itself is like blood. And I look back the way I have come–and far–back”–all of us leaned farther toward him, our hair a-prickle; his voice came like a ghostly whisper–“far back–I–see–the–grass–waving. There is no breeze, but the tall grass parts and sways in the moonlight, in a narrow, sinuous line–far away, but nearing every instant.” His voice died away.

Somebody broke the ensuing stillness: “And then–?”

“Then I awake. Never yet have I seen the foul monster. But that is the dream that haunts me, and from which I have wakened, in my childhood

screaming, in my manhood in cold sweat. At irregular intervals I dream it, and each time, lately"–he hesitated and then went on–"each time lately, the thing has been getting closer–closer–the waving of the grass marks his progress and he nears me with each dream; and when he reaches me, then–"

He stopped short, then without a word rose abruptly and entered the house. The rest of us sat silent for awhile, then followed him, for it was late.

How long I slept I do not know, but I woke suddenly with the impression that somewhere in the house someone had laughed, long, loud and hideously, as a maniac laughs. Starting up, wondering if I had been dreaming, I rushed from my room, just as a truly horrible shriek echoed through the house. The place was now alive with other people who had been awakened, and all of us rushed to Faming's room, whence the sounds had seemed to come.

Faming lay dead upon the floor, where it seemed he had fallen in some terrific struggle. There was no mark upon him, but his face was terribly distorted; as the face of a man who had been crushed by some superhuman force–such as some gigantic snake.

Sea Curse

And some return by the failing light

And some in the waking dream,

For she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts

That ride the rough roofbeam.

–Kipling

They were the brawlers and braggarts, the loud boasters and hard drinkers, of Faring town, John Kulrek and his crony Lie-lip Canool. Many a time have I, a tousled-haired lad, stolen to the tavern door to listen to their curses, their profane arguments and wild sea songs; half fearful and half in admiration of these wild rovers. Aye, all the people of Faring town gazed on

them with fear and admiration, for they were not like the rest of the Faring men; they were not content to ply their trade along the coasts and among the shark-teeth shoals. No yawls, no skiffs for them! They fared far, farther than any other man in the village, for they shipped on the great sailing-ships that went out on the white tides to brave the restless gray ocean and make ports in strange lands.

Ah, I mind it was swift times in the little sea-coast village of Faring when John Kulrek came home, with his furtive Lie-lip at his side, swaggering down the gang-plank, in his tarry sea-clothes, and the broad leather belt that held his ever-ready dagger; shouting condescending greeting to some favored acquaintance, kissing some maiden who ventured too near; then up the street, roaring some scarcely decent song of the sea. How the cringers and the idlers, the hangers-on, would swarm about the two desperate heroes, flattering and smirking, guffawing hilariously at each nasty jest. For to the tavern loafers and to some of the weaker among the straight-forward villagers, these men with their wild talk and their brutal deeds, their tales of the Seven Seas and the far countries, these men, I say, were valiant knights, nature's noblemen who dared to be men of blood and brawn.

And all feared them, so that when a man was beaten or a woman insulted, the villagers muttered–and did nothing. And so when Moll Farrell's niece was put to shame by John Kulrek, none dared even to put in words what all thought. Moll had never married, and she and the girl lived alone in a little hut down close to the beach, so close that in high tide the waves came almost to the door.

The people of the village accounted old Moll something of a witch, and she was a grim, gaunt old dame who had little to say to anyone. But she minded her own business, and eked out a slim living by gathering clams, and picking up bits of driftwood.

The girl was a pretty, foolish little thing, vain and easily befooled, else she had never yielded to the shark-like blandishments of John Kulrek.

I mind the day was a cold winter day with a sharp breeze out of the east when the old dame came into the village street shrieking that the girl had vanished. All scattered over the beach and back among the bleak inland

hills to search for her–all save John Kulrek and his cronies who sat in the tavern dicing and toping. All the while beyond the shoals, we heard the never-ceasing droning of the heaving, restless gray monster, and in the dim light of the ghostly dawn Moll Farrell's girl came home.

The tides bore her gently across the wet sands and laid her almost at her own door. Virgin-white she was, and her arms were folded across her still bosom; calm was her face, and the gray tides sighed about her slender limbs. Moll Farrell's eyes were stones, yet she stood above her dead girl and spoke no word till John Kulrek and his crony came reeling down from the tavern, their drinking-jacks still in their hands.

Drunk was John Kulrek, and the people gave back for him, murder in their souls; so he came and laughed at Moll Farrell across the body of her girl.

"Zounds!" swore John Kulrek; "the wench has drowned herself, Lie-lip!"

Lie-lip laughed, with the twist of his thin mouth. He always hated Moll Farrell, for it was she that had given him the name of Lie-lip.

Then John Kulrek lifted his drinking-jack, swaying on his uncertain legs. "A health to the wench's ghost!"

he bellowed, while all stood aghast.

Then Moll Farrell spoke, and the words broke from her in a scream which sent ripples of cold up and down the spines of the throng.

"The curse of the Foul Fiend upon you, John Kulrek!" she screamed. "The curse of God rest upon your vile soul throughout eternity! May you gaze on sights that shall sear the eyes of you and scorch the soul of you! May you die a bloody death and writhe in hell's flames for a million and a million and yet a million years! I curse you by sea and by land, by earth and by air, by the demons of the oceans and the demons of the swamplands, the fiends of the forest and the goblins of the hills! And you"–her lean finger stabbed at Lie-lip Canool and he started backward, his face paling–"you shall be the death of John Kulrek and he shall be the death of you! You shall bring John Kulrek to the doors of hell and John Kulrek shall bring you to the gallows-

tree! I set the seal of death upon your brow, John Kulrek! You shall live in terror and die in horror far out upon the cold gray sea! But the sea that took the soul of innocence to her bosom shall not take you, but shall fling forth your vile carcass to the sands! Aye, John Kulrek"–and she spoke with such a terrible intensity that the drunken mockery on the man's face changed to one of swinish stupidity–"the sea roars for the victim it will not keep! There is snow upon the hills, John Kulrek, and ere it melts your corpse will lie at my feet. And I shall spit upon it and be content."

Kulrek and his crony sailed at dawn for a long voyage, and Moll went back to her hut and her clam gathering. She seemed to grow leaner and more grim than ever and her eyes smoldered with a light not sane. The days glided by and people whispered among themselves that Moll's days were numbered, for she faded to a ghost of a woman; but she went her way, refusing all aid.

That was a short, cold summer and the snow on the barren inland hills never melted; a thing very unusual, which caused much comment among the villagers. At dusk and at dawn Moll would come up on the beach, gaze up at the snow which glittered on the hills, then out to sea with a fierce intensity in her gaze.

Then the days grew shorter, the nights longer and darker, and the cold gray tides came sweeping along the bleak strands, bearing the rain and sleet of the sharp east breezes.

And upon a bleak day a trading-vessel sailed into the bay and anchored. And all the idlers and the wastrels flocked to the wharfs, for that was the ship upon which John Kulrek and Lie-lip Canool had sailed. Down the gang-plank came Lie-lip, more furtive than ever, but John Kulrek was not there. To shouted queries, Canool shook his head. "Kulrek deserted ship at a port of Sumatra," said he. "He had a row with the skipper, lads; wanted me to desert, too, but no! I had to see you fine lads again, eh, boys?"

Almost cringing was Lie-lip Canool, and suddenly he recoiled as Moll Farrell came through the throng. A moment they stood eyeing each other; then Moll's grim lips bent in a terrible smile.

“There’s blood on your hand, Canool!” she lashed out suddenly–so suddenly that Lie-lip started and rubbed his right hand across his left sleeve.

“Stand aside, witch!” he snarled in sudden anger, striding through the crowd which gave back for him.

His admirers followed him to the tavern.

Now, I mind that the next day was even colder; gray fogs came drifting out of the east and veiled the sea and the beaches. There would be no sailing that day, and so all the villagers were in their snug houses or matching tales at the tavern. So it came about that Joe, my friend, a lad of my own age, and I, were the ones who saw the first of the strange thing that happened.

Being harum-scarum lads of no wisdom, we were sitting in a small rowboat, floating at the end of the wharfs, each shivering and wishing the other would suggest leaving, there being no reason whatever for our being there, save that it was a good place to build air-castles undisturbed.

Suddenly Joe raised his hand. “Say,” he said, “d’ye hear? Who can be out on the bay upon a day like this?”

“Nobody. What d’ye hear?”

“Oars. Or I’m a lubber. Listen.”

There was no seeing anything in that fog, and I heard nothing. Yet Joe swore he did, and suddenly his face assumed a strange look.

“Somebody rowing out there, I tell you! The bay is alive with oars from the sound! A score of boats at the least! Ye dolt, can ye not hear?”

Then, as I shook my head, he leaped and began to undo the painter.

“I’m off to see. Name me liar if the bay is not full of boats, all together like a close fleet. Are you with me?”

Yes, I was with him, though I heard nothing. Then out in the grayness we went, and the fog closed behind and before so that we drifted in a vague

world of smoke, seeing naught and hearing naught. We were lost in no time, and I cursed Joe for leading us upon a wild goose chase that was like to end with our being swept out to sea. I thought of Moll Farrell's girl and shuddered.

How long we drifted I know not. Minutes faded into hours, hours into centuries. Still Joe swore he heard the oars, now close at hand, now far away, and for hours we followed them, steering our course toward the sound, as the noise grew or receded. This I later thought of, and could not understand.

Then, when my hands were so numb that I could no longer hold the oar, and the forerunning drowsiness of cold and exhaustion was stealing over me, bleak white stars broke through the fog which glided suddenly away, fading like a ghost of smoke, and we found ourselves afloat just outside the mouth of the bay. The waters lay smooth as a pond, all dark green and silver in the starlight, and the cold came crisper than ever. I was swinging the boat about, to put back into the bay, when Joe gave a shout, and for the first time I heard the clack of oar-locks. I glanced over my shoulder and my blood went cold.

A great beaked prow loomed above us, a weird, unfamiliar shape against the stars, and as I caught my breath, sheered sharply and swept by us, with a curious swishing I never heard any other craft make. Joe screamed and backed oars frantically, and the boat walled out of the way just in time; for though the prow had missed us, still otherwise we had died. For from the sides of the ship stood long oars, bank upon bank which swept her along. Though I had never seen such a craft, I knew her for a galley. But what was she doing upon our coasts? They said, the far-farers, that such ships were still in use among the heathens of Barbary; but it was many a long, heaving mile to Barbary, and even so she did not resemble the ships described by those who had sailed far.

We started in pursuit, and this was strange, for though the waters broke about her prow, and she seemed fairly to fly through the waves, yet she was making little speed, and it was no time before we caught up with her. Making our painter fast to a chain far back beyond the reach of the swishing oars, we hailed those on deck. But there came no answer, and at last,

conquering our fears, we clambered up the chain and found ourselves upon the strangest deck man has trod for many a long, roaring century.

“This is no Barbary rover!” muttered Joe fearsomely. “Look, how old it seems! Almost ready to fall to pieces. Why, ’tis fairly rotten!”

There was no one on deck, no one at the long sweep with which the craft was steered. We stole to the hold and looked down the stair. Then and there, if ever men were on the verge of insanity, it was we. For there were rowers there, it is true; they sat upon the rowers’ benches and drove the creaking oars through the gray waters. *And they that rowed were skeletons!*

Shrieking, we plunged across the deck, to fling ourselves into the sea. But at the rail I tripped upon something and fell headlong, and as I lay, I saw a thing which vanquished my fear of the horrors below for an instant. The thing upon which I had tripped was a human body, and in the dim gray light that was beginning to steal across the eastern waves I saw a dagger hilt standing up between his shoulders. Joe was at the rail, urging me to haste, and together we slid down the chain and cut the painter.

Then we stood off into the bay. Straight on kept the grim galley, and we followed, slowly, wondering.

She seemed to be heading straight for the beach beside the wharfs, and as we approached, we saw the wharfs thronged with people. They had missed us, no doubt, and now they stood, there in the early dawn light, struck dumb by the apparition which had come up out of the night and the grim ocean.

Straight on swept the galley, her oars a-swish; then ere she reached the shallow water–crash!–a terrific reverberation shook the bay. Before our eyes the grim craft seemed to melt away; then she vanished, and the green waters seethed where she had ridden, but there floated no driftwood there, nor did there ever float any ashore. Aye, something floated ashore, but it was grim driftwood!

We made the landing amid a hum of excited conversation that stopped suddenly. Moll Farrell stood before her hut, limned gauntly against the ghostly dawn, her lean hand pointing seaward. And across the sighing wet

sands, borne by the gray tide, something came floating; something that the waves dropped at Moll Farrell's feet. And there looked up at us, as we crowded about, a pair of unseeing eyes set in a still, white face. John Kulrek had come home.

Still and grim he lay, rocked by the tide, and as he lurched sideways, all saw the dagger hilt that stood from his back–the dagger all of us had seen a thousand times at the belt of Lie-lip Canool.

"Aye, I killed him!" came Canool's shriek, as he writhed and groveled before our gaze. "At sea on a still night in a drunken brawl I slew him and hurled him overboard! And from the far seas he has followed me"–his voice sank to a hideous whisper–"because–of–the–curse–the–sea–would–not–keep–his–body!"

And the wretch sank down, trembling, the shadow of the gallows already in his eyes.

"Aye!" Strong, deep and exultant was Moll Farrell's voice. "From the hell of lost craft Satan sent a ship of bygone ages! A ship red with gore and stained with the memory of horrid crimes! None other would bear such a vile carcass! The sea has taken vengeance and has given me mine. See now, how I spit upon the face of John Kulrek."

And with a ghastly laugh, she pitched forward, the blood starting to her lips. And the sun came up across the restless sea.

The Moor Ghost

They haled him to the crossroads

As day was at its close;

They hung him to the gallows

And left him for the crows.

His hands in life were bloody,

His ghost will not be still;

He haunts the naked moorlands

About the gibbet hill.

And oft a lonely traveler

Is found upon the fen

Whose dead eyes hold a horror

Beyond the world of men.

The villagers then whisper,

With accents grim and dour:

“This man has met at midnight

The phantom of the moor.”

Moon Mockery

I walked in Tara’s Wood one summer night,

And saw, amid the still, star-haunted skies,

A slender moon in silver mist arise,

And hover on the hill as if in fright.

Burning, I seized her veil and held her tight:

An instant all her glow was in my eyes;

Then she was gone, swift as a white bird flies,

And I went down the hill in opal light.

And soon I was aware, as down I came,

That all was strange and new on every side;

Strange people went about me to and fro,

And when I spoke with trembling mine own name

They turned away, but one man said: “He died

In Tara Wood, a hundred years ago.”

The Little People

My sister threw down the book she was reading. To be exact, she threw it at me.

“Foolishness!” said she. “Fairy tales! Hand me that copy of Michael Arlen.”

I did so mechanically, glancing at the volume which had incurred her youthful displeasure. The story was

“The Shining Pyramid” by Arthur Machen.

“My dear girl,” said I, “this is a masterpiece of outre literature.”

“Yes, but the idea!” she answered. “I outgrew fairy tales when I was ten.”

“This tale is not intended as an exponent of common-day realism,” I explained patiently.

“Too far-fetched,” she said with the finality of seventeen. “I like to read about things that could happen–who were ‘The Little People’ he speaks of, the same old elf and troll business?”

“All legends have a base of fact,” I said. “There is a reason–”

“You mean to tell me such things actually existed?” she exclaimed. “Rot!”

“Not so fast, young lady,” I admonished, slightly nettled. “I mean that all myths had a concrete beginning which was later changed and twisted so as to take on a supernatural significance. Young people,” I continued, bending a brotherly frown on her pouting lips, “have a way of either accepting entirely or rejecting entirely such things as they do not understand. The ‘Little People’ spoken of by Machen are supposed to be descendants of the prehistoric people who inhabited Europe before the Celts came down out of the North.

“They are known variously as Turanians, Picts, Mediterraneans, and Garlic-eaters. A race of small, dark people, traces of their type may be found in primitive sections of Europe and Asia today, among the Basques of Spain, the Scotch of Galloway and the Lapps.

“They were workers in flint and are known to anthropologists as men of the Neolithic or polished stone age. Relics of their age show plainly that they had reached a comparatively high stage of primitive culture by the beginning of the bronze age, which was ushered in by the ancestors of the Celts–our prehistoric tribesmen, young lady.

“These destroyed or enslaved the Mediterranean peoples and were in turn ousted by the Teutonic tribes.

All over Europe, and especially in Britain, the legend is that these Picts, whom the Celts looked upon as scarcely human, fled to caverns under the earth and lived there, coming out only at night, when they would burn, murder, and carry off children for their bloody rites of worship. Doubtless there was much in this theory. Descendants of cave people, these fleeing dwarfs would no doubt take refuge in caverns and no doubt managed to live undiscovered for generations.”

“That was a long time ago,” she said with slight interest. “If there ever were any of those people they’re dead now. Why, we’re right in the country where they’re supposed to perform and haven’t seen any signs of them.”

I nodded. My sister Joan did not react to the weird West country as I did. The immense menhirs and cromlechs which rose starkly upon the moors

seemed to bring back vague, racial memories, stirring my Celtic imagination.

“Maybe,” I said, adding unwisely, “You heard what that old villager said– the warning about walking on the fen at night. No one does it. You’re very sophisticated, young lady, but I’ll bet you wouldn’t spend a night alone in that stone ruin we can see from my window.”

Down came her book and her eyes sparkled with interest and combat.

“I’ll do it!” she exclaimed. “I’ll show you! He did say no one would go near those old rocks at night, didn’t he? I will, and stay there the rest of the night!”

She was on her feet instantly and I saw I had made a mistake.

“No, you won’t, either,” I vetoed. “What would people think?”

“What do I care what they think?” she retorted in the up to date spirit of the Younger Generation.

“You haven’t any business out on the moors at night,” I answered. “Granting that these old myths are so much empty wind, there are plenty of shady characters who wouldn’t hesitate to harm a helpless girl. It’s not safe for a girl like you to be out unprotected.”

“You mean I’m too pretty?” she asked naively.

“I mean you’re too foolish,” I answered in my best older brother manner.

She made a face at me and was silent for a moment and I, who could read her agile mind with absurd ease, could tell by her pensive features and sparkling eyes exactly what she was thinking. She was mentally surrounded by a crowd of her cronies back home and I could guess the exact words which she was already framing: “My dears, I spent a whole night in the most romantic old ruin in West England which was supposed to be haunted–”

I silently cursed myself for bringing the subject up when she said abruptly, “I’m going to do it, just the same. Nobody will harm me and I wouldn’t pass up the adventure for anything!”

“Joan,” I said, “I forbid you to go out alone tonight or any other night.”

Her eyes flashed and I instantly wished I had couched my command in more tactful language. My sister was willful and high spirited, used to having her way and very impatient of restraint.

“You can’t order me around,” she flamed. “You’ve done nothing but bully me ever since we left America.”

“It’s been necessary,” I sighed. “I can think of a number of pastimes more pleasant than touring Europe with a flapper sister.”

Her mouth opened as if to reply angrily then she shrugged her slim shoulders and settled back down in her chair, taking up a book.

“Alright, I didn’t want to go much anyhow,” she remarked casually. I eyed her suspiciously; she was not usually subdued so easily. In fact some of the most harrowing moments of my life have been those in which I was forced to cajole and coax her out of a rebellious mood.

Nor was my suspicion entirely vanquished when a few moments later she announced her intention of retiring and went to her room just across the corridor.

I turned out the light and stepped over to my window, which opened upon a wide view of the barren, undulating wastes of the moor. The moon was just rising and the land glimmered grisly and stark beneath its cold beams. It was late summer and the air was warm, yet the whole landscape *looked* cold, bleak and forbidding. Across the fen I saw rise, stark and shadowy, the rough and mighty spires of the ruins.

Gaunt and terrible they loomed against the night, silent phantoms from

[A page appears to be missing from Howard’s typescript here.]

she assented with no enthusiasm and returned my kiss in a rather perfunctory manner. Compulsory obedience was repugnant.

I returned to my room and retired. Sleep did not come to me at once however, for I was hurt at my sister's evident resentment and I lay for a long time, brooding and staring at the window, now framed boldly in the molten silver of the moon. At length I dropped into a troubled slumber, through which flitted vague dreams wherein dim, ghostly shapes glided and leered.

I awoke suddenly, sat up and stared about me wildly, striving to orient my muddled senses. An oppressive feeling as of impending evil hovered about me. Fading swiftly as I came to full consciousness, lurked the eery remembrance of a hazy dream wherein a white fog had floated through the window and had assumed the shape of a tall, white bearded man who had shaken my shoulder as if to arouse me from sleep. All of us are familiar with the curious sensations of waking from a bad dream–the dimming and dwindling of partly remembered thoughts and feelings. But the wider awake I became, the stronger grew the suggestion of evil.

I sprang up, snatched on my clothing and rushed to my sister's room, flung open the door. The room was unoccupied.

I raced down the stair and accosted the night clerk who was maintained by the small hotel for some obscure reason.

"Miss Costigan, sir? She came down, clad for outdoors, a while after midnight–about half an hour ago, sir, and said she was going to take a stroll on the moor and not to be alarmed if she did not return at once, sir."

I hurled out of the hotel, my pulse pounding a devil's tattoo. Far out across the fen I saw the ruins, bold and grim against the moon, and in that direction I hastened. At length–it seemed hours–I saw a slim figure some distance in front of me. The girl was taking her time and in spite of her start of me, I was gaining–soon I would be within hearing distance. My breath was already coming in gasps from my exertions but I quickened my pace.

The aura of the fen was like a tangible something, pressing upon me, weighting my limbs–and always that presentiment of evil grew and grew.

Then, far ahead of me, I saw my sister stop suddenly, and look about her confusedly. The moonlight flung a veil of illusion–I could see her but I could not see what had caused her sudden terror. I broke into a run, my blood leaping wildly and suddenly freezing as a wild, despairing scream burst out and sent the moor echoes flying.

The girl was turning first one way and then another and I screamed for her to run toward me; she heard me and started toward me running like a frightened antelope and then I *saw*. Vague shadows darted about her–short, dwarfish shapes–just in front of me rose a solid wall of them and I saw that they had blocked her from gaining to me. Suddenly, instinctively I believe, she turned and raced for the stone columns, the whole horde after her, save those who remained to bar my path.

I had no weapon nor did I feel the need of any; a strong, athletic youth, I was in addition an amateur boxer of ability, with a terrific punch in either hand. Now all the primal instincts surged redly within me; I was a cave man bent on vengeance against a tribe who sought to steal a woman of my family. I did not fear–I only wished to close with them. Aye, I recognized these–I knew them of old and all the old wars rose and roared within the misty caverns of my soul. Hate leaped in me as in the old days when men of my blood came from the North. Aye, though the whole spawn of Hell rise up from those caverns which honeycomb the moors.

Now I was almost upon those who barred my way; I saw plainly the stunted bodies, the gnarled limbs, the snake-like, beady eyes that stared unwinkingly, the grotesque, square faces with their unhuman features, the shimmer of flint daggers in their crooked hands. Then with a tigerish leap I was among them like a leopard among jackals and details were blotted out in a whirling red haze. Whatever they were, they were of living substance; features crumpled and bones shattered beneath my flailing fists and blood darkened the moon-silvered stones. A flint dagger sank hilt deep in my thigh. Then the ghastly throng broke each way and fled before me, as their ancestors fled before mine, leaving four silent dwarfish shapes stretched on the moor.

Heedless of my wounded leg, I took up the grim race anew; Joan had reached the druidic ruins now and she leaned against one of the columns, exhausted, blindly seeking there protection in obedience to some dim instinct just as women of her blood had done in bygone ages.

The horrid things that pursued her were closing in upon her. They would reach her before I. God knows the thing was horrible enough but back in the recesses of my mind, grimmer horrors were whispering; dream memories wherein stunted creatures pursued white limbed women across such fens as these.

Lurking memories of the ages when dawns were young and men struggled with forces which were not of men.

The girl toppled forward in a faint, and lay at the foot of the towering column in a piteous white heap.

And they closed in–closed in. What they would do I knew not but the ghosts of ancient memory whispered that they would do Something of hideous evil, something foul and grim.

From my lips burst a scream, wild and inarticulate, born of sheer elemental horror and despair. I could not reach her before those fiends had worked their frightful will upon her. The centuries, the ages swept back. This was as it had been in the beginning. And what followed, I know not how to explain–but I think that that wild shriek whispered back down the long reaches of Time to the Beings my ancestors worshipped and that blood answered blood. Aye, such a shriek as could echo down the dusty corridors of lost ages and bring back from the whispering abyss of Eternity the ghost of the only one who could save a girl of Celtic blood.

The foremost of the Things were almost upon the prostrate girl; their hands were clutching for her, when suddenly beside her a form stood. There was no gradual materializing. The figure leaped suddenly into being, etched bold and clear in the moonlight. A tall white bearded man, clad in long robes–the man I had seen in my dream! A druid, answering once more the desperate need of people of his race. His brow was high and noble, his eyes mystic and far-seeing–so much I could see, even from where I ran. His arm

rose in an imperious gesture and the Things shrank back–back–back–They broke and fled, vanishing suddenly, and I sank to my knees beside my sister, gathering the child into my arms. A moment I looked up at the man, sword and shield against the powers of darkness, protecting helpless tribes as in the world's youth, who raised his hand above us as if in benediction, then he too vanished suddenly and the moor lay bare and silent.

Dead Man's Hate

They hanged John Farrel in the dawn amid the market-place;

At dusk came Adam Brand to him and spat upon his face.

"Ho, neighbors all," spake Adam Brand, "see ye John Farrel's fate!

'Tis proven here a hempen noose is stronger than man's hate!

"For heard ye not John Farrel's vow to be avenged on me

Come life or death? See how he hangs high on the gallows tree!"

Yet never a word the people spake, in fear and wild surprize–

For the grisly corpse raised up its head and stared with sightless eyes, And with strange motions, slow and stiff, pointed at Adam Brand And clambered down the gibbet tree, the noose within its hand.

With gaping mouth stood Adam Brand like a statue carved of stone, Till the dead man laid a clammy hand hard on his shoulder-bone.

Then Adam shrieked like a soul in hell; the red blood left his face And he reeled away in a drunken run through the screaming market-place; And close behind, the dead man came with face like a mummy's mask, And the dead joints cracked and the stiff legs creaked with their unwonted task.

Men fled before the flying twain or shrank with bated breath,

And they saw on the face of Adam Brand the seal set there by death.

He reeled on buckling legs that failed, yet on and on he fled; So through the shuddering market-place, the dying fled the dead.

At the riverside fell Adam Brand with a scream that rent the skies; Across him fell John Farrel’s corpse, nor ever the twain did rise.

There was no wound on Adam Brand but his brow was cold and damp, For the fear of death had blown out his life as a witch blows out a lamp.

His lips were writhed in a horrid grin like a fiend’s on Satan’s coals, And the men that looked on his face that day, his stare still haunts their souls.

Such was the doom of Adam Brand, a strange, unearthly fate;

OceanofPDF.com

For stronger than death or hempen noose are the fires of a dead man’s hate.

The Tavern

There stands, close by a dim, wolf-haunted wood,

A tavern like a monster, brooding thing.

About its sullen gables no birds sing.

Oft a lone traveller, when the moon is blood,

Lights from his horse in quest of sleep and meal.

His footfalls fade within and sound no more;

He comes not forth; but from a secret door

Bearing a grisly burden, shadows steal.

By day, ’neath trees whose silent, green leaves glisten,

The tavern crouches, hating day and light.

A lurking vampire, terrible and lean;

Sometimes behind its windows may be seen

Vague leprous faces, haggard, fungus-white,

That peer and start and ever seem to listen.

Rattle of Bones

“Landlord, ho!” The shout broke the lowering silence and reverberated through the black forest with sinister echoing.

“This place hath a forbidding aspect, meseemeth.”

The two men stood in front of the forest tavern. The building was low, long and rambling, built of heavy logs. Its small windows were heavily barred and the door was closed. Above the door its sinister sign showed faintly–a cleft skull.

This door swung slowly open and a bearded face peered out. The owner of the face stepped back and motioned his guests to enter–with a grudging gesture it seemed. A candle gleamed on a table; a flame smoldered in the fireplace.

“Your names?”

“Solomon Kane,” said the taller man briefly.

“Gaston l’Armon,” the other spoke curtly. “But what is that to you?”

“Strangers are few in the Black Forest,” grunted the host, “bandits many. Sit at yonder table and I will bring food.”

The two men sat down, with the bearing of men who have traveled far. One was a tall gaunt man, clad in a featherless hat and somber black garments, which set off the dark pallor of his forbidding face. The other was of a different type entirely, bedecked with lace and plumes, although his finery was somewhat stained from travel. He was handsome in a bold way, and his restless eyes shifted from side to side, never still an instant.

The host brought wine and food to the rough-hewn table and then stood back in the shadows, like a somber image. His features, now receding into vagueness, now luridly etched in the firelight as it leaped and flickered, were masked in a beard which seemed almost animal-like in thickness. A great nose curved above this beard and two small red eyes stared unblinkingly at his guests.

“Who are you?” suddenly asked the younger man.

“I am the host of the Cleft Skull Tavern,” sullenly replied the other. His tone seemed to challenge his questioner to ask further.

“Do you have many guests?” l’Armon pursued.

“Few come twice,” the host grunted.

Kane started and glanced up straight into those small red eyes, as if he sought for some hidden meaning in the host’s words. The flaming eyes seemed to dilate, then dropped sullenly before the Englishman’s cold stare.

“I’m for bed,” said Kane abruptly, bringing his meal to a close. “I must take up my journey by daylight.”

“And I,” added the Frenchman. “Host, show us to our chambers.”

Black shadows wavered on the walls as the two followed their silent host down a long, dark hall. The stocky, broad body of their guide seemed to grow and expand in the light of the small candle which he carried, throwing a long, grim shadow behind him.

At a certain door he halted, indicating that they were to sleep there. They entered; the host lit a candle with the one he carried, then lurched back the way he had come.

In the chamber the two men glanced at each other. The only furnishings of the room were a couple of bunks, a chair or two and a heavy table.

“Let us see if there be any way to make fast the door,” said Kane. “I like not the looks of mine host.”

“There are racks on door and jamb for a bar,” said Gaston, “but no bar.”

“We might break up the table and use its pieces for a bar,” mused Kane.

“Mon Dieu,” said l’Armon, “you are timorous, m’sieu.”

Kane scowled. “I like not being murdered in my sleep,” he answered gruffly.

“My faith!” the Frenchman laughed. “We are chance met–until I overtook you on the forest road an hour before sunset, we had never seen each other.”

“I have seen you somewhere before,” answered Kane, “though I can not now recall where. As for the other, I assume every man is an honest fellow until he shows me he is a rogue; moreover I am a light sleeper and slumber with a pistol at hand.”

The Frenchman laughed again.

“I was wondering how m’sieu could bring himself to sleep in the room with a stranger! Ha! Ha! All right, m’sieu Englishman, let us go forth and take a bar from one of the other rooms.”

Taking the candle with them, they went into the corridor. Utter silence reigned and the small candle twinkled redly and evilly in the thick darkness.

“Mine host hath neither guests nor servants,” muttered Solomon Kane. “A strange tavern! What is the name, now? These German words come not easily to me–the Cleft Skull? A bloody name, i’faith.”

They tried the rooms next to theirs, but no bar rewarded their search. At last they came to the last room at the end of the corridor. They entered. It was furnished like the rest, except that the door was provided with a small barred opening, and fastened from the outside with a heavy bolt, which was secured at one end to the door-jamb. They raised the bolt and looked in.

“There should be an outer window, but there is not,” muttered Kane. “Look!”

The floor was stained darkly. The walls and the one bunk were hacked in places, great splinters having been torn away.

“Men have died in here,” said Kane, somberly. “Is yonder not a bar fixed in the wall?”

“Aye, but ’tis made fast,” said the Frenchman, tugging at it. “The–”

A section of the wall swung back and Gaston gave a quick exclamation. A small, secret room was revealed, and the two men bent over the grisly thing that lay upon its floor.

“The skeleton of a man!” said Gaston. “And behold, how his bony leg is shackled to the floor! He was imprisoned here and died.”

“Nay,” said Kane, “the skull is cleft–methinks mine host had a grim reason for the name of his hellish tavern. This man, like us, was no doubt a wanderer who fell into the fiend’s hands.”

“Likely,” said Gaston without interest; he was engaged in idly working the great iron ring from the skeleton’s leg bones. Failing in this, he drew his sword and with an exhibition of remarkable strength cut the chain which joined the ring on the leg to a ring set deep in the log floor.

“Why should he shackle a skeleton to the floor?” mused the Frenchman. “Monbleu! ’Tis a waste of good chain. Now, m’sieu,” he ironically addressed the white heap of bones, “I have freed you and you may go where you like!”

“Have done!” Kane’s voice was deep. “No good will come of mocking the dead.”

“The dead should defend themselves,” laughed l’Armon. “Somehow, I will slay the man who kills me, though my corpse climb up forty fathoms of ocean to do it.”

Kane turned toward the outer door, closing the door of the secret room behind him. He liked not this talk which smacked of demonry and witchcraft; and he was in haste to face the host with the charge of his guilt.

As he turned, with his back to the Frenchman, he felt the touch of cold steel against his neck and knew that a pistol muzzle was pressed close beneath the base of his brain.

“Move not, m’sieu!” The voice was low and silky. “Move not, or I will scatter your few brains over the room.”

The Puritan, raging inwardly, stood with his hands in the air while l’Armon slipped his pistols and sword from their sheaths.

“Now you can turn,” said Gaston, stepping back.

Kane bent a grim eye on the dapper fellow, who stood bareheaded now, hat in one hand, the other hand leveling his long pistol.

“Gaston the Butcher!” said the Englishman somberly. “Fool that I was to trust a Frenchman! You range far, murderer! I remember you now, with that cursed great hat off–I saw you in Calais some years agone.”

“Aye–and now you will see me never again. What was that?”

“Rats exploring yon skeleton,” said Kane, watching the bandit like a hawk, waiting for a single slight wavering of that black gun muzzle. “The sound was of the rattle of bones.”

“Like enough,” returned the other. “Now, M’sieu Kane, I know you carry considerable money on your person. I had thought to wait until you slept and then slay you, but the opportunity presented itself and I took it. You trick easily.”

“I had little thought that I should fear a man with whom I had broken bread,” said Kane, a deep timbre of slow fury sounding in his voice.

The bandit laughed cynically. His eyes narrowed as he began to back slowly toward the outer door.

Kane’s sinews tensed involuntarily; he gathered himself like a giant wolf about to launch himself in a death leap, but Gaston’s hand was like a rock and the pistol never trembled.

“We will have no death plunges after the shot,” said Gaston. “Stand still, m’sieu; I have seen men killed by dying men, and I wish to have distance enough between us to preclude that possibility. My faith–I will shoot, you will roar and charge, but you will die before you reach me with your bare hands. And mine host will have another skeleton in his secret niche. That is, if I do not kill him myself. The fool knows me not nor I him, moreover–”

The Frenchman was in the doorway now, sighting along the barrel. The candle, which had been stuck in a niche on the wall, shed a weird and flickering light which did not extend past the doorway. And with the suddenness of death, from the darkness behind Gaston's back, a broad, vague form rose up and a gleaming blade swept down. The Frenchman went to his knees like a butchered ox, his brains spilling from his cleft skull. Above him towered the figure of the host, a wild and terrible spectacle, still holding the hanger with which he had slain the bandit.

"Ho! ho!" he roared. "Back!"

Kane had leaped forward as Gaston fell, but the host thrust into his very face a long pistol which he held in his left hand.

"Back!" he repeated in a tigerish roar, and Kane retreated from the menacing weapon and the insanity in the red eyes.

The Englishman stood silent, his flesh crawling as he sensed a deeper and more hideous threat than the Frenchman had offered. There was something inhuman about this man, who now swayed to and fro like some great forest beast while his mirthless laughter boomed out again.

"Gaston the Butcher!" he shouted, kicking the corpse at his feet. "Ho! ho! My fine brigand will hunt no more; I had heard of this fool who roamed the Black Forest–he wished gold and he found death! Now your gold shall be mine; and more than gold–vengeance!"

"I am no foe of yours," Kane spoke calmly.

"All men are my foes! Look–the marks on my wrists! See–the marks on my ankles! And deep in my back–the kiss of the knout! And deep in my brain, the wounds of the years of the cold, silent cells where I lay as punishment for a crime I never committed!" The voice broke in a hideous, grotesque sob.

Kane made no answer. This man was not the first he had seen whose brain had shattered amid the horrors of the terrible Continental prisons.

“But I escaped!” the scream rose triumphantly, “and here I make war on all men…. What was that?”

Did Kane see a flash of fear in those hideous eyes?

“My sorcerer is rattling his bones!” whispered the host, then laughed wildly. “Dying, he swore his very bones would weave a net of death for me. I shackled his corpse to the floor, and now, deep in the night, I hear his bare skeleton clash and rattle as he seeks to be free, and I laugh, I laugh! Ho! ho! How he yearns to rise and stalk like old King Death along these dark corridors when I sleep, to slay me in my bed!”

Suddenly the insane eyes flared hideously: “You were in that secret room, you and this dead fool! Did he talk to you?”

Kane shuddered in spite of himself. Was it insanity or did he actually hear the faint rattle of bones, as if the skeleton had moved slightly? Kane shrugged his shoulders; rats will even tug at dusty bones.

The host was laughing again. He sidled around Kane, keeping the Englishman always covered, and with his free hand opened the door. All was darkness within, so that Kane could not even see the glimmer of the bones on the floor.

“All men are my foes!” mumbled the host, in the incoherent manner of the insane. “Why should I spare any man? Who lifted a hand to my aid when I lay for years in the vile dungeons of Karlsruhe–and for a deed never proven? Something happened to my brain, then. I became as a wolf–a brother to these of the Black Forest to which I fled when I escaped.

“They have feasted, my brothers, on all who lay in my tavern–all except this one who now clashes his bones, this magician from Russia. Lest he come stalking back through the black shadows when night is over the world, and slay me–for who may slay the dead?–I stripped his bones and shackled him. His sorcery was not powerful enough to save him from me, but all men know that a dead magician is more evil than a living one. Move not, Englishman! Your bones I shall leave in this secret room beside this one, to–”

The maniac was standing partly in the doorway of the secret room, now, his weapon still menacing Kane.

Suddenly he seemed to topple backward, and vanished in the darkness; and at the same instant a vagrant gust of wind swept down the outer corridor and slammed the door shut behind him. The candle on the wall flickered and went out. Kane's groping hands, sweeping over the floor, found a pistol, and he straightened, facing the door where the maniac had vanished. He stood in the utter darkness, his blood freezing, while a hideous muffled screaming came from the secret room, intermingled with the dry, grisly rattle of fleshless bones. Then silence fell.

Kane found flint and steel and lighted the candle. Then, holding it in one hand and the pistol in the other, he opened the secret door.

"Great God!" he muttered as cold sweat formed on his body. "This thing is beyond all reason, yet with mine own eyes I see it! Two vows have here been kept, for Gaston the Butcher swore that even in death he would avenge his slaying, and his was the hand which set yon fleshless monster free. And he–"

The host of the Cleft Skull lay lifeless on the floor of the secret room, his bestial face set in lines of terrible fear; and deep in his broken neck were sunk the bare fingerbones of the sorcerer's skeleton.

The Fear That Follows

The smile of a child was on her lips–oh, smile of a last long rest.

My arm went up and my arm went down and the dagger pierced her breast.

Silent she lay–oh still, oh still!–with the breast of her gown turned red.

Then fear rose up in my soul like death and I fled from the face of the dead.

The hangings rustled upon the walls, velvet and black they shook, And I thought to see strange shadows flash from the dark of each door and nook.

Tapestries swayed on the ghostly walls as if in a wind that blew; Yet never a breeze stole through the rooms and my black fear grew and grew.

Moonlight dappled the pallid sward as I climbed o’er the window sill; I looked not back at the darkened house which lay so grim and still.

The trees reached phantom hands to me, their branches brushed my hair, Footfalls whispered amid the grass, yet never a man was there.

The shades loomed black in the forest deeps, black as the doom of death; Amid the whispers of shapes unseen I stole with bated breath,

Till I came at last to a ghostly mere bordered with silver sands; A faint mist rose from its shimmering breast as I knelt to lave my hands.

The waters mirrored my haggard face, I bent close down to see–

Oh, Mother of God! A grinning skull leered up from the mere at me!

With a gibbering scream I rose and fled till I came to a mountain dim And a great black crag in the blood-red moon loomed up like a gibbet grim.

Then down from the great red stars above, each like a misty plume, There fell on my face long drops of blood and I knew at last my doom.

Then I turned me slow to the only trail that was left upon earth for me, The trail that leads to the hangman’s cell and the grip of the gallows tree.

The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux

Many fights are won and lost by the living, but this is a tale of one which was won by a man dead over a hundred years. John Taverel, manager of ring champions, sitting in the old East Side A.C. one cold wintry day, told me this story of the ghost that won the fight and the man who worshipped the ghost. Let John Taverel tell the tale in his own words, as he told it to me: You remember Ace Jessel, the great negro boxer whom I managed. An ebony giant he was, four inches over six feet in height, his fighting weight two hundred and thirty pounds. He moved with the smooth ease of a gigantic leopard and his pliant steel muscles rippled under his shiny skin. A

clever boxer for so large a man, he carried the smashing jolt of a trip hammer in each huge black fist.

Yet for all that, the road over which I, as his manager, steered him, was far from smooth and at times I despaired, for Ace seemed to lack a fighting heart. Courage he had plenty, courage to stand up to a vicious beating and to keep on going after his face had been pounded and battered to a bloody mass, as he proved in that terrible battle with Maul Finnegan, which became almost mythical in boxing annals.

Courage he had, but not the aggressiveness which drives the perfect fighter ever to the attack, nor the killer instinct which sends him plunging after the reeling, bloody and beaten foe. And a boxer who lacks these qualities is likely to fail when put to the supreme test.

Ace was content to box mostly, outpointing his opponents and piling up just enough lead to keep from losing. And the public was never fond of these tactics. Therefore they jeered and booed him every so often, but though their taunts angered me, they only broadened Ace's good-natured grin. And his fights still drew great crowds because on the rare occasions when he was stung out of his defensive role, or when he was matched with a clever man whom he had to knock out in order to win, the fans saw a real battle that thrilled their blood. And even so, time and again he stepped away from a sagging foe, giving the beaten man time to recover and return to the attack, instead of finishing him–while the crowd raved and I tore my hair.

Now Ace Jessel, indifferent drifter, happy-go-lucky wastrel though he seemed, had one deep and abiding emotion, and that was a fanatical worship for one Tom Molyneaux, first champion of America and sturdy fighting man of color–according to some authorities, the greatest black ringman that ever lived.

Tom Molyneaux died in Ireland a hundred years ago but the memory of his valiant deeds in America and Europe was Ace Jessel's direct incentive to action. Reading an account of Tom's life and battles was what started Ace on the fistic trail which led from the wharves where he toiled as a young boy, to–but listen to the story.

Ace's most highly prized possession was a painted portrait of the old battler. He had discovered this–a rare find indeed, since even woodcuts of Molyneaux are rare–among the collections of a London sportsman, and had prevailed on the owner to sell it. Paying for it had taken every cent that Ace made in four fights but he counted it cheap at the price. He removed the original frame and replaced it with a frame of solid silver, a slim elegant work of art which, considering that the portrait was full length and life size, was rather more than extravagant. But no honor was too expensive for "Misto Tom" and Ace simply tripled the number of his bouts to meet the cost.

So finally my brains and Ace's mallet fists had cleared us a road to the top of the game. Ace loomed up as a heavyweight menace and the champion's manager was ready to sign with us when an interruption came.

A form hove into view on the fistic horizon which dwarfed and overshadowed all other contenders, including my man. This was Mankiller Gomez. He was all which his name implies. Gomez was his ring name, given him by the Spaniard who discovered him and brought him to America. His real name was Balanga Guma and he was a full-blooded Senegalese from the West Coast of Africa.

Once in a century ring fans see a man like Gomez in action. Once in a hundred years there rises a fighter like the Senegalese–a born killer who crashes through the general ruck of fighters as a buffalo crashes through a thicket of dead wood. He was a savage, a tiger. What he lacked in actual skill, he made up by ferocity of attack, by ruggedness of body and smashing power of arm. From the time he landed in New York, with a long list of European victories behind him, it was inevitable that he should batter down all opposition, and at last the white champion looked to see the black savage looming above the broken forms of his victims. The champion saw the writing on the wall, but the public was clamoring for a match and whatever else his faults, the title holder was a fighting champion.

Ace Jessel, who alone of all the foremost challengers had not met Gomez, was shoved into discard, and as early summer dawned on New York, a title was lost and won, and Mankiller Gomez, son of the black jungle, rose up king of all fighting men.

The sporting world and the public at large hated and feared the new champion. Boxing fans like savagery in the ring, but Gomez did not confine his ferocity to the ring. His soul was abysmal. He was ape-like, primordial–the very spirit of that morass of barbarism from which mankind has so tortuously climbed, and toward which men look with so much suspicion.

There went forth a search for a White Hope, but the result was always the same. Challenger after challenger went down before the terrible onslaught of the Mankiller and at last only one man remained who had not crossed gloves with Gomez–Ace Jessel.

I hesitated in throwing my man in with a battler like Gomez, for my fondness for the great good-natured negro was more than the friendship of manager for fighter. Ace was something more than a meal-ticket to me for I knew the real nobility underlying Ace's black skin, and I hated to see him battered into a senseless ruin by a man I knew in my heart to be more than Jessel's match. I wanted to wait awhile, to let Gomez wear himself out with his terrific battles and the dissipations that were sure to follow the savage's success. These super-sluggers never last long, any more than a jungle native can withstand the temptations of civilization.

But the slump that follows a really great title holder's gaining the belt was on, and matches were scarce.

The public was clamoring for a title fight, sports writers were raising Cain and accusing Ace of cowardice, promoters were offering alluring purses, and at last I signed for a fifteen round go between Mankiller Gomez and Ace Jessel.

At the training quarters I turned to Ace.

"Ace, do you think you can whip him?"

"Misto John," Ace answered, meeting my eye with a straight gaze, "Ah'll do mah best, but Ah's mighty afeard Ah cain't do it. Dat man ain't human." I knew this was bad; a man is more than half whipped when he goes into the ring in that frame of mind.

Later I came into Ace's room for something and halted in the doorway in amazement. I had heard the battler talking in a low voice as I came up, but had supposed one of the handlers or sparring partners was in the room with him. Now I saw that he was alone. He was standing before his idol–the portrait of Tom Molyneaux.

"Misto Tom," he was saying humbly, "Ah ain't nevah met no man yet what could even knock me off mah feet, but Ah reckon dat nigguh can. Ah's gwine to need help mighty bad, Misto Tom."

I felt almost as if I had interrupted a religious rite. It was uncanny–had it not been for Ace's evident deep sincerity, I would have felt it to be unholy. But to Ace, Tom Molyneaux was something more than a saint.

I stood in the doorway in silence, watching the strange tableau. The artist who painted the picture so long ago had wrought with remarkable skill. The short black figure seemed to stand out boldly from the faded canvas. A breath of bygone days, it seemed, clad in the long tights of that other day, the powerful legs braced far apart, the knotted arms held stiffly and high, just as Molyneaux had appeared when he fought Tom Cribb of England so long ago.

Ace Jessel stood before the painted figure, head sunk upon his mighty chest as if listening to some dim whisper inside his own soul. And as I watched, a curious and fantastic thought came into my brain–the memory of an age-old superstition. You know it has been said by delvers into the occult that the carving of statues or the painting of pictures has power to draw back from the void of Eternity souls long flown, and to recreate them in shadowy semblance. I wondered if Ace had ever heard of this superstition and thought by doing obeisance to Molyneaux's portrait to conjure the dead man's spirit out of the realms of the dead for advice and aid. I shrugged my shoulders at this ridiculous idea and turned away. As I did, I glanced again at the picture before which Ace still stood like a great image of black basalt, and was aware of a peculiar illusion; the canvas seemed to ripple slightly, like the surface of a lake across which a faint breeze is blowing.

However I forgot all this as the day of the fight drew near.

The great crowd cheered Ace to the echo as he climbed in the ring; cheered again, not so heartily, as Gomez appeared. They afforded a strange contrast, those two negroes, alike in color but how different in all other aspects!

Ace was tall, clean-limbed and rangy, long and smooth of muscle, clear of eye and broad of forehead.

Gomez seemed stocky by comparison, though he stood a good six feet two. Where Jessel's sinews were long and smooth like great cables, his were knotty and bulging. His calves, thighs, arms and shoulders stood out in great bunches of muscles. His small bullet head was set squarely between gigantic shoulders, and his forehead was so low that his kinky wool seemed to lower over his small bestial and bloodshot eyes. On his chest was a thick grizzle of matted black hair.

He grinned cavernously, thumped his breast and flexed his mighty arms with the insolent assurance of the savage. Ace, in his corner, grinned at the crowd, but an ashy tint was on his dusky face and his knees trembled.

The usual remarks were made, instructions given by the referee, weights announced–230 for Ace, 248

for Gomez–then over the great stadium the lights went off save for those over the ring where two black giants faced each other like men alone on the ridge of the world.

At the gong Gomez whirled in his corner and came out with a breath-taking roar of pure ferocity. Ace, frightened though he must have been, rushed to meet him with the courage of a cave man charging a gorilla, and they met headlong in the center of the ring.

The first blow was the Mankiller's, a left swing that glanced Ace's ribs. Jessel came back with a long left to the face and a straight right to the body that stung. Gomez bulled in, swinging both hands and Ace, after one futile attempt to mix it with him, gave back. The champion drove him across the ring, sending in a savage left to the body as Ace clinched. As they broke Gomez shot a terrible right to the chin and Ace reeled into the ropes. A great "Ahhh!" went up from the crowd as the champion plunged after him like a

famished wolf, but Ace managed to dive between the lashing arms and clinch, shaking his head to clear it.

Gomez sent in a left, largely smothered by Ace's clutching arms, and the referee warned the Senegalese.

At the break Ace stepped back, jabbing swift and cleverly with his left, and the round ended with the champion, bellowing like a buffalo, trying to get past that rapier-like arm.

Between rounds I cautioned Ace to keep away from infighting as much as possible, where Gomez's superior strength would count heavily, and to use his footwork to avoid punishment as much as he could.

The second round started much like the first, Gomez rushing and Ace using all his skill to stave him off and avoid those terrible smashes. It's hard to get a shifty boxer like Ace in a corner, when he is fresh and unweakened and at long range had the advantage of his superior science over Gomez, whose one idea was to get in close and batter down his foes by sheer strength and ferocity. Still, in spite of Ace's speed and skill, just before the gong sounded Gomez got the range and sank a vicious left to the wrist in Ace's midriff and the tall negro weaved slightly as he walked to his corner. I could see the beginning of the end.

The vitality and power of Gomez seemed endless; there was no wearing him down and it would not take many of his blows, landed, to rob Ace of his speed of foot and accuracy of eye. Then, forced to stand and trade punches, he was done.

Gomez, seeing he had stung his man, came plunging out for the third round with murder in his eye. He ducked a straight left, took a hard right uppercut square in the face and hooked both hands to the body, then straightened with a terrific right to the chin, which Ace robbed of most of its force by swaying with the blow. And while the champion was still off balance, Ace measured him coolly and shot in a fierce right hook flush on the chin. Gomez's head flew back as if hinged to his shoulders and he was stopped in his tracks, but even as the crowd rose, hands clenching, lips parted, in hopes

he would go down, the champion shook his bullet head and came in roaring. The round ended with both men locked in a clinch in the center of the ring.

At the beginning of the fourth round Gomez attacked and drove Ace about the ring before a shower of blows which he could not seem to wholly avoid. Stung and desperate, Ace made a stand in a neutral corner and sent Gomez back on his heels with a left and right to the body, but took a savage left to the face in return. Then suddenly the champion crashed through with a deadly left to the solar plexus and as Ace staggered, shot a killing right to the chin. Ace fell back into the ropes, instinctively raising his hands and sinking his chin on his chest. Gomez's short fierce smashes were partly blocked by his shielding gloves and suddenly, pinned on the ropes as he was, and still dazed from the Mankiller's attack, Ace went into terrific action and, slugging toe to toe with the champion, beat him off and drove him back across the ring!

The crowd went insane but, crouching behind Ace's corner, I saw the writing on the wall. Ace was fighting as he had never fought before, but no man on earth could stand the pace the champion was setting.

Battling along the ropes, Ace sent a savage left to the body and a right and left to the face but was repaid by a right-hand smash to the ribs that made him wince in spite of himself, and just at the gong Gomez landed another of those deadly left-handers to the body.

Ace's handlers worked over him swiftly, for I saw that the tall black was weakening. A few more rounds of this would spell the end.

"Ace, can't you keep away from those body smashes?"

"Misto John, suh, Ah'll try," he answered.

The gong! Ace came in with a rush, his magnificent body vibrating with dynamic energy. Gomez met him, his iron muscles bunching into a compact fighting unit. Crash–crash–and again, crash! A clinch. And as they broke, Gomez drew back his great right arm and launched a terrible blow to Ace's mouth. The tall negro reeled–he went down! Then, without stopping for the count which I was screaming for him to take, he gathered his long steely

legs under him and was up with a bound, blood gushing down his black chest.

Gomez leaped in and Ace, with the fury of desperation, met him with a terrific right, square to the jaw.

And Gomez crashed to the canvas on his shoulder blades! The crowd rose screaming! In the space of ten seconds both men had been floored for the first time in the life of each!

“One! Two! Three! Four!” the referee’s arm rose and fell.

Gomez was up, unhurt, wild with fury. Roaring like a wild beast, he plunged in, brushed aside Ace’s hammering arms and crashed his right hand with the full weight of his mighty shoulder behind it, full into Ace’s midriff. Jessel went an ashy color–he swayed like a tall tree, and Gomez beat him to his knees with rights and lefts which sounded like the blows of caulking mallets.

“One! Two! Three! Four!–”

Ace was writhing on the canvas, striving to get his legs beneath him. The roar of the fans was a torrent of sound, an ocean of noise which drowned out all thought.

“Five! Six! Seven!–”

Ace was up! Gomez came charging across the stained canvas, gibbering his pagan fury. His blows beat upon the staggering challenger like a hail of sledges. A left–a right–another left which Ace had not strength to duck.

“One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight!–”

Again Ace was up, weaving, staring blankly, helpless. A swinging left hurled him back into the ropes and rebounding from them he went to his knees–the gong!

As his handlers and I sprang into the ring Ace groped blindly for his corner and dropped limply upon the stool.

“Ace, he’s too much for you.”

A grin bent Jessel’s bloody lips and an indomitable spirit looked out of his bloodshot eyes.

“Misto John, please suh, don’t t’row in de sponge. Must Ah take it, Ah takes it standin’. Dat boy cain’t last at dis pace all night, suh.”

No, but neither could Ace Jessel, in spite of his remarkable vitality and his marvelous recuperative powers which sent him back up for the next round, with a show of renewed strength and freshness, at least.

The sixth and seventh were comparatively tame. Perhaps Gomez really was fatigued from the terrific pace he had been setting. At any rate, Ace managed to make it more or less of a sparring match at long range and the crowd was treated to an exhibition showing how long a man, out on his feet, can stand off and keep away from a slugger bent solely on his destruction. Even I marveled at the brand of boxing which Ace was showing, even though I knew that Gomez was fighting cautiously, for him. He had sampled the power of Ace’s right hand in that frenzied fifth round and perhaps he was wary of a trick.

For the first time in his life he had sprawled on the canvas. He knew he was winning, and I think he was content to rest a couple of rounds, take his time for a space and gather his energies for a final onslaught.

This began as the gong sounded for the eighth round. Gomez launched his usual sledge hammer attack, drove Ace about the ring and floored him in a neutral corner. His style of fighting was such that when he was determined on a foe’s destruction, skill, speed and science could not avert but only postpone the eventual outcome. Ace took the count of nine and rose, back-pedalling. But Gomez was after him; the champion missed twice with his left and then sank a right under the heart that turned Ace ashy. A left to the jaw made his knees buckle and he clinched desperately. On the break-away Ace sent a straight left to the face and right hook to the chin, but the blows lacked their old force and Gomez shook them off and sank his left wrist deep in Ace’s midsection. Ace again clinched but the champion shoved him

away and drove him across the ring with savage hooks to the body. At the gong they were slugging along the ropes.

Ace reeled to the wrong corner, and when his handlers led him to his own, he sank down on the stool, his legs trembling and his great dusky chest heaving from his superhuman exertions. I glanced across at the champion who sat glowering at his foe. He too was showing signs of the fray, but he was much fresher than Ace. The referee walked over, looked at Jessel hesitantly and then spoke to me.

Through the mists which veiled his bruised brain, Ace realized the import of his words and struggled to rise, a kind of fear flaming in his eyes.

“Misto John, don’ let him stop it, suh! Don’ let him do it! Ah ain’t hu’t nuthin’ like dat ’ud hu’t me!”

The referee shrugged his shoulders and walked back to the center of the ring, and I turned to one of the trainers and bade him bring me the flat bundle I had brought with me into the stadium.

There was little use giving advice to Ace. He was too battered to understand–in his numbed brain there was room only for one thought–to fight and fight, and keep on fighting–the old primal instinct that is stronger than all things save death.

At the sound of the gong he reeled out to meet his doom with an indomitable courage that brought the crowd to its feet yelling. He struck, a wild aimless left, and the champion plunged in hitting with both hands until Ace went down. At “nine” he was up and back-pedalled instinctively until Gomez reached him with a long straight right and sent him down again. Again he took “nine” before he reeled up and now the crowd was silent. Not one voice was raised in an urge for the kill. This was butchery, primitive slaughter, and the courage of Ace Jessel took their breath as it gripped my heart.

Ace fell blindly into a clinch, and another and another, till the Mankiller, furious, shook him off and sank his right to the body. Ace’s ribs gave way like rotten wood, with a dry crack heard distinctly all over the stadium–a

strangled cry went up from the crowd and Jessel gasped thickly and fell to his knees.

“–Seven! Eight!–” and the great black form was writhing on the canvas.

“–Nine!” and the miracle had happened and Ace was on his feet, swaying, jaw sagging, arms hanging limply.

Gomez glared at him, not in pity, but as if unable to understand how his foe could have risen again, then came plunging in to finish him. Ace was in dire straits. Blood blinded him and his feet slipped in great smears of it on the canvas–his blood. Both eyes were nearly closed, and when he breathed gustily through his smashed nose, a red haze surrounded him. Deep cuts gashed cheek and cheek bones and his left side was a mass of battered red flesh. He was going on fighting instinct alone now, and never again would any man doubt that Ace Jessel had a fighting heart.

Yet a fighting heart alone is not enough when the body that holds it is broken and battered and mists of unconsciousness veil the brain. Ace sank down before Gomez’s panting onslaught and this time the crowd knew that it was final.

When a man has taken the beating that Ace had taken, something more than body and heart must come into the game to carry him through. Something to inspire and stimulate the dazed brain, to fire it to heights of super-human achievement. I had planned to furnish this inspiration, if the worst came to the worst, in the only way which I knew would touch Ace.

Before leaving the training quarters, I had, unknown to Ace, removed the picture of Tom Molyneaux from its frame, and brought it to the stadium with me, carefully wrapped. I now took this, and as Ace’s eyes, instinctively and without his own volition, sought his corner, I held the portrait up, just outside the glare of the ring lights, so while illumined by them, it appeared illusive and dim. It may be thought that I acted wrongly and selfishly, to thus seek to bring to his feet for more punishment a man almost dead from the beating, but the outsider cannot fathom the souls of the children of the fight game, to whom winning is greater than life, and losing, worse than death.

All eyes were glued on the prostrate form in the center of the ring, on the wind-blown champion sagging against the ropes, on the arm of the referee, which rose and fell with the regularity of doom. I doubt if four men in the audience saw my action, but Ace Jessel saw. I caught the gleam that came into his bloodshot and dazed eyes. I saw him shake his head violently. I saw him begin sluggishly to gather his long legs under him. It seemed a long time; the drone of the referee rose as it neared its climax–then, by all the gods, Ace Jessel was up! The crowd went insane and screaming.

I saw his eyes blaze with a strange wild light. And as I live today, *the picture in my hands shook suddenly and violently!*

A cold wind passed like death across me and I heard the man next to me shiver involuntarily as he drew his coat closer about him. But it was no cold wind that gripped my soul as I looked, wide-eyed and staring, into the ring where the greatest drama the boxing world has ever known was being enacted.

There was Ace Jessel, bloody, terrible, throbbing and pulsing with new dynamic life, fired by a superhuman power–there was Mankiller Gomez, speechless with amazement at his foe's new burst of fury–there was the immobile-faced referee– *and to my horror I saw that there were four men in that ring!*

And the fourth–a short, massive black man, barrel-chested and mighty-limbed, clad in the long tights of another day. And as I looked I saw that this man was not as other men for beyond him I saw the ropes of the ring and dimly, the ring lights, as if I were looking through a dark mist–as if I were looking through him.

His mighty arm was about Ace Jessel's waist as my fighter crashed upon the weary and disheartened Gomez; his bare hard fists fell with Ace's on the head and body of the desperate Mankiller. Whether Gomez saw or realized he saw this Stranger, I do not know. Dazed by the unnaturalness of Ace's sudden comeback, by the uncanny strength of Ace who should have been fainting on the canvas, Gomez staggered, weakening; bewildered and mazed he was unable to decide upon a stand to make, and before he could rally was beaten down, crashed and battered down and out by long straight

smashes sent in with the speed and power of a pile driver. And the last blow, a straight right that would have felled an ox, and did fell Mankiller Gomez, was driven not alone by the power of Ace's mighty shoulder, but by the aid of a shadowy black hand on Jessel's wrist. As I live today, that Fourth Man guided Ace's hand to Gomez's chin and backed the blow with the power of his own tremendous shoulders.

A moment the strange tableau burned itself into my brain. The astounded referee counting over the prostrate champion, and Ace Jessel, standing, head lowered and arms dangling, supported by a short, mighty figure in long ring tights. Then this figure faded before my very gaze and, as the portrait of Tom Molyneaux fell from my nerveless fingers, I felt it shake as if it shuddered.

As I climbed into the ring with the roar of the insane fans thundering in my brain, I wondered dazedly as I wonder today–was I given to see that sight alone of all that throng because I held the picture in my hands?

The crowd saw only a miracle, a man beaten nearly to death coming back with unexplainable strength and vitality to conquer his conqueror. They did not see the Fourth Man. Nor did Mankiller Gomez.

Ace Jessel? A negro never talks on some subjects and I have never asked him any questions on that matter. But as he collapsed in his corner, I bent over him and heard him murmur as he lost consciousness:

"Misto Tom–he done it, suh–his han' was on mah wrist–when–Ah–dropped–Gomez."

That old superstition is justified as far as I am concerned. Hereafter I will not doubt that deep devotion coupled with the possession of a life-like portrait, can conjure back from the unknown voids of the astral world, the soul or spirit or ghost which inhabited the living body of which the portrait is a likeness. A door perhaps, a portrait is, through which astral beings pass back and forth between this world and the next–whatever that world may be.

But when I said no man save Ace Jessel and I saw the Fourth Man, I am not altogether correct. After the bout the referee, a steely-nerved, cold-eyed son of the old-time school, said to me:

“Did you notice in that last round that a cold wind seemed to blow across the ring? Now tell me straight, am I going crazy or did I see a dark shadow hovering about Ace Jessel when he dropped Gomez?”

“You did,” I answered. “And unless we are all insane, the ghost of Tom Molyneaux was in that ring tonight.”

Casonetto’s Last Song

I eyed the package curiously. It was thin and flat, and the address was written clearly in the curving elegant hand I had learned to hate–the hand I knew to now be cold in death.

“You had better be careful, Gordon,” said my friend Costigan. “Sure, why should that black devil be sending you anything but something to do you harm?”

“I had thought of a bomb or something similar,” I answered, “but this is too thin a package to contain anything like that. I’ll open it.”

“By the powers!” Costigan laughed shortly. “’Tis one of his songs he’s sending you!”

An ordinary phonograph record lay before us.

Ordinary, did I say? I might say the most extraordinary record in the world. For, to the best of our knowledge, it was the only one which held imprisoned in its flat bosom the golden voice of Giovanni Casonetto, that great and evil genius whose operatic singing had thrilled the world, and whose dark and mysterious crimes had shocked that same world.

“The death cell where Casonetto lay awaits the next doomed one, and the black singer lies dead,” said Costigan. “What then is the spell of this disc that he sends it to the man whose testimony sent him to the gallows?”

I shrugged my shoulders. By no art of mine, but purely through accident had I stumbled upon Casonetto's monstrous secret. By no wish of mine had I come upon the cavern where he practiced ancient abominations and offered up human sacrifices to the devil he worshipped. But what I had seen I told in court, and before the hangman adjusted the noose, Casonetto had promised me such a fate as no man had ever experienced before.

All the world knew of the atrocities practiced by the inhuman demonic cult of which Casonetto had been high priest; and now that he was dead, records made of his voice were sought by wealthy collectors, but according to the terms of his last wishes, all of these had been destroyed.

At least I had thought so, but the thin round disc in my hand proved that at least one had escaped the general destruction. I gazed at it, but the surface in the center was blank and without title.

"Read the note," suggested Costigan.

A small slip of white paper had been contained in the package also. I scanned it. The letters were in Casonetto's handwriting.

"To my friend Stephen Gordon, to be listened to alone in his study."

"That's all," I said, after reading this curious request aloud.

"Sure, and 'tis more than enough. Is it not black magic he's trying to make on you? Else why should he wish you to listen to his caterwauling alone?"

"I don't know. But I think I'll do it."

"You're a fool," said Costigan frankly. "If ye will not be taking my advice and throwing the thing into the sea, it's myself will be with you when you put it on your talking machine. And that's final!"

I did not try to argue. Truly, I was somewhat apprehensive of Casonetto's promised vengeance, though I could not see how this was to be accomplished by the mere rendition of a song heard on a phonograph.

Costigan and I repaired to my study and there placed on the machine the last record of Giovanni Casonetto's golden voice. I saw Costigan's jaw muscles bulge belligerently as the disc began to whirl and the diamond point to spin down the circling grooves. I involuntarily tensed myself as if for a coming struggle. Clear and loud a voice spoke.

"Stephen Gordon!"

I started in spite of myself and almost answered! How strange and fearful it is to hear your name spoken in the voice of a man you know to be dead!

"Stephen Gordon," the clear, golden and hated voice went on, if you hear this I shall be dead, for if I live I shall dispose of you in another manner. The police will soon be here, and they have cut off every avenue of escape. There is nothing for me to do but stand my trial, and your words will put a noose about my neck. But there is time for one last song!

"This song I shall imprison in the disc which now rests upon my recording machine, and before the police arrive I shall send it to you by one who will not fail me. You will receive it through the mails the day after I am hanged.

"My friend, this is a suitable setting for the last song of the high priest of Satan! I am standing in the black chapel where you first surprised me when you came blundering into my secret cavern, and my clumsy neophytes let you escape.

"Before me stands the shrine of the Unnamable and before it the red-stained altar where many a virgin soul has gone winging up to the dark stars. On all sides hover dark mysterious things, and I hear the swish of mighty wings in the gloom.

"Satan, lover of darkness, gird my soul with evil and strike chords of horror in my golden song.

"Stephen Gordon, harken ye!"

Full, deep and triumphant, the golden voice surged up, lifted in a strange rhythmic chant, indescribably haunting and weird.

“Great God!” whispered Costigan. “He’s singing the invocation from the Black Mass!”

I did not reply. The uncanny notes of that song seemed to stir my very heart within me. In the darksome caverns of my soul, something blind and monstrous moved and stirred like a dragon waking from slumber. The room faded and grew indistinct as I fell under the mesmeric power of the chant. About me inhuman forces seemed to glide and I could almost sense the touch of bat-like wings brushing my face in their flight–as though by virtue of his singing, the dead man had summoned up ancient and horrible demons to haunt me.

I saw again the sombre chapel, lit by a single small fire that flickered and leaped on the altar, behind and above which brooded the Horror, the Unnamable horned and winged thing to which the devil worshippers bowed. I saw again the red-dyed altar, the long sacrificial dagger raised in the hand of the black acolyte, the swaying robed forms of the worshippers.

The voice rose and rose, swinging into a triumphant booming. It filled the room–the world, the sky, the universe! It blotted out the stars with a tangible veil of darkness! I staggered from it as from a physical force.

If ever hate and evil were incarnated in *sound* I heard and felt it then. That voice bore me down to the deeps of Hell undreamed. Abysses loathsome and endless yawned before me. I had hints and glimpses of inhuman voids and unholy dimensions outside of all human experience. All the concentrated essence of Purgatory flowed out at me from that whirling disc, on the wings of that wonderful and terrible voice.

Cold sweat stood out on my body as I realized the feelings of a victim bound for the sacrifice. I was the victim, I lay on the altar and the hand of the slayer hovered above me, gripping the dagger.

From the whirling disc the voice surged on, sweeping me irresistably to my doom, swinging higher and higher, deeper and deeper, tinged with insanity as it approached the climax.

I realized my danger. I felt my brain crumbling before the onslaught of those spears of sound. I sought to speak, to scream! But my mouth gaped without sound. I tried to step forward, to shut off the machine, to break the record. But I could not move.

Now the chant rose to heights unnamable and unbearable. A hideous triumph swept its notes; a million mocking devils screamed and bellowed at me, taunting me through that flood of demon-music, as if the chant were a gate through which the hordes of Hell came streaming, red-handed and roaring.

Now it swept with dizzy speed toward the point where, in the Black Mass, the dagger drinks the life of the sacrifice, and with one last effort that strained fading soul and dimming brain, I broke the mesmeric chains–I screamed! An inhuman, unearthly shriek, the shriek of a soul being dragged into Hell–of a mind being hurled into insanity.

And echoing my screech came the shout of Costigan as he leaned forward and crashed his sledge hammer fist down on the top of the machine, smashing it, and shattering into oblivion that terrible, golden voice forever.

The Touch of Death

As long as midnight cloaks the earth

With shadows grim and stark,

God save us from the Judas kiss

Of a dead man in the dark.

Old Adam Farrel lay dead in the house wherein he had lived alone for the last twenty years. A silent, churlish recluse, in his life he had known no friends, and only two men had watched his passing.

Dr. Stein rose and glanced out the window into the gathering dusk.

“You think you can spend the night here, then?” he asked his companion.

This man, Falred by name, assented.

“Yes, certainly. I guess it’s up to me.”

“Rather a useless and primitive custom, sitting up with the dead,” commented the doctor, preparing to depart, “but I suppose in common decency we will have to bow to precedence. Maybe I can find some one who’ll come over here and help you with your vigil.”

Falred shrugged his shoulders. “I doubt it. Farrel wasn’t liked–wasn’t known by many people. I scarcely knew him myself, but I don’t mind sitting up with the corpse.”

Dr. Stein was removing his rubber gloves and Falred watched the process with an interest that almost amounted to fascination. A slight, involuntary shudder shook him at the memory of touching these gloves–slick, cold, clammy things, like the touch of death.

“You may get lonely tonight, if I don’t find anyone,” the doctor remarked as he opened the door. “Not superstitious, are you?”

Falred laughed. “Scarcely. To tell the truth, from what I hear of Farrel’s disposition, I’d rather be watching his corpse than have been his guest in life.”

The door closed and Falred took up his vigil. He seated himself in the only chair the room boasted, glanced casually at the formless, sheeted bulk on the bed opposite him, and began to read by the light of the dim lamp which stood on the rough table.

Outside the darkness gathered swiftly, and finally Falred laid down his magazine to rest his eyes. He looked again at the shape which had, in life, been the form of Adam Farrel, wondering what quirk in the human nature made the sight of a corpse not only so unpleasant, but such an object of fear to many.

Unthinking ignorance, seeing in dead things a reminder of death to come, he decided lazily, and began idly contemplating as to what life had held for

this grim and crabbed old man, who had neither relatives nor friends, and who had seldom left the house wherein he had died. The usual tales of miser-hoarded wealth had accumulated, but Falred felt so little interest in the whole matter that it was not even necessary for him to overcome any temptation to pry about the house for possible hidden treasure.

He returned to his reading with a shrug. The task was more boresome than he had thought for. After a while he was aware that every time he looked up from his magazine and his eyes fell upon the bed with its grim occupant, he started involuntarily as if he had, for an instant, forgotten the presence of the dead man and was unpleasantly reminded of the fact. The start was slight and instinctive, but he felt almost angered at himself. He realized, for the first time, the utter and deadening silence which enwrapped the house–a silence apparently shared by the night, for no sound came through the window. Adam Farrel had lived as far apart from his neighbors as possible, and there was no other house within hearing distance.

Falred shook himself as if to rid his mind of unsavory speculations, and went back to his reading. A sudden vagrant gust of wind whipped through the window, in which the light in the lamp flickered and went out suddenly. Falred, cursing softly, groped in the darkness for matches, burning his fingers on the hot lamp chimney. He struck a match, relighted the lamp, and glancing over at the bed, got a horrible mental jolt. Adam Farrel's face stared blindly at him, the dead eyes wide and blank, framed in the gnarled gray features. Even as Falred instinctively shuddered, his reason explained the apparent phenomenon: the sheet that covered the corpse had been carelessly thrown across the face and the sudden puff of wind had disarranged and flung it aside.

Yet there was something grisly about the thing, something fearsomely suggestive–as if, in the cloaking dark, a dead hand had flung aside the sheet, just as if the corpse were about to rise….

Falred, an imaginative man, shrugged his shoulders at these ghastly thoughts and crossed the room to replace the sheet. The dead eyes seemed to stare at him malevolently, with an evilness that transcended the dead man's churlishness in life. The workings of a vivid imagination, Falred

knew, and he re-covered the gray face, shrinking as his hand chanced to touch the cold flesh–slick and clammy, the touch of death.

He shuddered with the natural revulsion of the living for the dead, and went back to his chair and magazine.

At last, growing sleepy, he lay down upon a couch which, by some strange whim of the original owner, formed part of the room's scant furnishings, and composed himself for slumber. He decided to leave the light burning, telling himself that it was in accordance with the usual custom of leaving lights burning for the dead; for he was not willing to admit to himself that already he was conscious of a dislike for lying in the darkness with the corpse. He dozed, awoke with a start and looked at the sheeted form of the bed.

Silence reigned over the house, and outside it was very dark.

The hour was approaching midnight, with its accompanying eery domination over the human mind. Falred glanced again at the bed where the body lay and found the sight of the sheeted object most repellent. A fantastic idea had birth in his mind and grew, that beneath the sheet, the mere lifeless body had become a strange, monstrous thing, a hideous, conscious being, that watched him with eyes which burned through the fabric of the cloth. This thought–a mere fantasy, of course–he explained to himself by the legends of vampires, undead, ghosts and such like–the fearsome attributes with which the living have cloaked the dead for countless ages, since primitive man first recognized in death something horrid and apart from life.

Man feared death, thought Falred, and some of his fear of death took hold on the dead so that they, too, were feared. And the sight of the dead engendered grisly thoughts, gave rise to dim fears of hereditary memory, lurking back in the dark corners of the brain.

At any rate, that silent, hidden thing was getting on his nerves. He thought of uncovering the face, on the principle that familiarity breeds contempt. The sight of the features, calm and still in death, would banish, he thought, all such wild conjectures as were haunting him in spite of himself. But the

thought of those dead eyes staring in the lamplight was intolerable; so at last he blew out the light and lay down. This fear had been stealing upon him so insidiously and gradually that he had not been aware of its growth.

With the extinguishing of the light, however, and the blotting out of the sight of the corpse, things assumed their true character and proportions, and Falred fell asleep almost instantly, on his lips a faint smile for his previous folly.

He awakened suddenly. How long he had been asleep he did not know. He sat up, his pulse pounding frantically, the cold sweat beading his forehead. He knew instantly where he was, remembered the other occupant of the room. But what had awakened him? A dream–yes, now he remembered–a hideous dream in which the dead man had risen from the bed and stalked stiffly across the room with eyes of fire and a horrid leer frozen on his gray lips. Falred had seemed to lie motionless, helpless; then as the corpse reached a gnarled and horrible hand, he had awakened.

He strove to pierce the gloom, but the room was all blackness and all without was so dark that no gleam of light came through the window. He reached a shaking hand toward the lamp, then recoiled as if from a hidden serpent. Sitting here in the dark with a fiendish corpse was bad enough, but he dared not light the lamp, for fear that his reason would be snuffed out like a candle at what he might see. Horror, stark and unreasoning, had full possession of his soul; he no longer questioned the instinctive fears that rose in him.

All those legends he had heard came back to him and brought a belief in them. Death was a hideous thing, a brain-shattering horror, imbuing lifeless men with a horrid malevolence. Adam Farrel in his life had been simply a churlish but harmless man; now he was a terror, a monster, a fiend lurking in the shadows of fear, ready to leap on mankind with talons dipped deep in death and insanity.

Falred sat there, his blood freezing, and fought out his silent battle. Faint glimmerings of reason had begun to touch his fright when a soft, stealthy sound again froze him. He did not recognize it as the whisper of the night

wind across the window-sill. His frenzied fancy knew it only as the tread of death and horror.

He sprang from the couch, then stood undecided. Escape was in his mind but he was too dazed to even try to formulate a plan of escape. Even his sense of direction was gone. Fear had so stultified his mind that he was not able to think consciously. The blackness spread in long waves about him and its darkness and void entered into his brain. His motions, such as they were, were instinctive. He seemed shackled with mighty chains and his limbs responded sluggishly, like an imbecile's.

A terrible horror grew up in him and reared its grisly shape, that the dead man was behind him, was stealing upon him from the rear. He no longer thought of lighting the lamp; he no longer thought of anything. Fear filled his whole being; there was room for nothing else.

He backed slowly away in the darkness, hands behind him, instinctively feeling the way. With a terrific effort he partly shook the clinging mists of horror from him, and, the cold sweat clammy upon his body, strove to orient himself. He could see nothing, but the bed was across the room, in front of him. He was backing away from it. There was where the dead man was lying, according to all rules of nature; if the thing were, as he felt, behind him, then the old tales were true: death did implant in lifeless bodies an unearthly animation, and dead men did roam the shadows to work their ghastly and evil will upon the sons of men. Then–great God!–what was man but a wailing infant, lost in the night and beset by frightful things from the black abysses and the terrible unknown voids of space and time? These conclusions he did not reach by any reasoning process; they leaped full-grown into his terror-dazed brain. He worked his way slowly backward, groping, clinging to the thought that the dead man *must* be in front of him.

Then his back-flung hands encountered something–something slick, cold and clammy–like the touch of death. A scream shook the echoes, followed by the crash of a falling body.

The next morning they who came to the house of death found two corpses in the room. Adam Farrel's sheeted body lay motionless upon the bed, and across the room lay the body of Falred, beneath the shelf where Dr. Stein

had absent-mindedly left his gloves–rubber gloves, slick and clammy to the touch of a hand groping in the dark–a hand of one fleeing his own fear–rubber gloves, slick and clammy and cold, like the touch of death.

Out of the Deep

A Tale of Faring Town

Adam Falcon sailed at dawn and Margeret Deveral, the girl who was to marry him, stood on the wharfs in the cold vagueness to wave a good-bye. At dusk Margeret knelt, stony eyed, above the still white form that the crawling tide had left crumpled on the beach.

The people of Faring town gathered about, whispering:

“The fog hung heavy; mayhap she went ashore on Ghost Reef. Strange that his corpse alone should drift back to Faring harbor–and so swiftly.”

And an undertone:

“Alive or dead, he would come to her!”

The body lay above the tide mark, as if flung by a vagrant wave; slim, but strong and virile in life, now darkly handsome even in death. The eyes were closed, strange to say, so it appeared that he but slept.

The seaman’s clothes he wore dripped salt water and fragments of sea-weed clung to them.

“Strange,” muttered old John Harper, owner of the Sea-lion Inn and the oldest ex-seaman of Faring town. “He sank deep, for these weeds grow only at the bottom of the ocean, aye, in the cold green caves of the sea.”

Margeret spoke no word, she but knelt, her hands pressed to her cheeks, eyes wide and staring.

“Take him in your arms, lass, and kiss him,” gently urged the people of Faring, “for ’tis what he would have wished, alive.”

The girl obeyed mechanically, shuddering at the coldness of his body. Then as her lips touched his, she screamed and recoiled.

“This is not Adam!” she shrieked, staring wildly about her.

The people nodded sadly to each other.

“Her brain is turned,” they whispered, and then they lifted the corpse and bore it to the house wherein Adam Falcon had lived–where he had hoped to bring his bride when he returned from his voyage.

And the people brought Margeret along with them, caressing her and soothing her with gentle words. But the girl walked like one in a trance, her eyes still staring in that strange manner.

They laid the body of Adam Falcon on his bed with death candles at the head and feet, and the salt water from his garments trickled off the bed and splashed on the floor. For it is a superstition in Faring town as on many dim coasts, that monstrously bad luck will follow if a drowned man’s clothes are removed.

And Margeret sat there in the death room and spoke to none, staring fixedly at Adam’s dark calm face.

And as she sat, John Gower, a rejected suitor of hers, and a moody, dangerous man, came and looking over her shoulder, said:

“Sea death brings a curious change, if that is the Adam Falcon I knew.” Black looks were passed his way, whereat he seemed surprized, and men rose and quietly escorted him to the door.

“You hated Adam Falcon, John Gower,” said Tom Leary. “And you hate Margeret because the child preferred a better man than you. Now, by Satan, you’ll not be torturing the girl with your calloused talk.

Get out and stay!”

Gower scowled darkly at this, but Tom Leary stood up boldly to him, and the men of Faring town backed him, so John turned his back squarely upon

them and strode away. Yet to me it had seemed that what he had said had not been meant as a taunt or an insult, but simply the result of a sudden, startling thought.

And as he walked away I heard him mutter to himself:

"–Alike, and yet strangely unlike him–"

Night had fallen on Faring town and the windows of the houses blinked through the darkness; through the windows of Adam Falcon's house glimmered the death candles where Margeret and others kept silent watch until dawn. And beyond the friendly warmth of the town's lights, the dusky green titan brooded along the strand, silent now as if in sleep, but ever ready to leap with hungry talons. I wandered down to the beach and, reclining on the white sand, gazed out over the slowly heaving expanse which coiled and billowed in drowsy undulations like a sleeping serpent.

The sea–the great, grey, cold-eyed woman of the ages. Her tides spoke to me as they have spoken to me since birth–in the swish of the flat waves along the sand, in the wail of the ocean-bird, in her throbbing silence. I am very old and very wise (brooded the sea), I have no part of man; I slay men and even their bodies I fling back upon the cowering land. There is life in my bosom but it is not human life (whispered the sea), my children hate the sons of men.

A shriek shattered the stillness and brought me to my feet, gazing wildly about me. Above the stars gleamed coldly and their scintillant ghosts sparkled on the ocean's cold surface. The town lay dark and still, save for the death lights in Adam Falcon's house–and the echoes still shuddered through the pulsating silence.

I was among the first to arrive at the door of the death room and there halted aghast with the rest.

Margeret Deveral lay dead upon the floor, her slender form crushed like a slim ship among shoals, and crouching over her, cradling her in his arms, was John Gower, the gleam of insanity in his wide eyes. And the death candles still flickered and leaped, but no corpse lay on Adam Falcon's bed.

“God’s mercy!” gasped Tom Leary. “John Gower, ye fiend from Hell, what devil’s work is this?”

Gower looked up.

“I told you,” he shrieked. “She knew–and I knew–’twas not Adam Falcon, that cold monster flung up by the mocking waves! ’Tis some demon inhabiting his corpse! Hark–I sought my bed and tried to sleep, but each time there came the thought of this soft girl sitting beside that cold inhuman thing she thought her lover, and at last I rose and came to the window. Margeret sat, drowsing, and the others, fools that they were, slept in other parts of the house. And as I watched–”

He shook as a wave of shuddering passed over him.

“As I watched, Adam’s eyes opened, and the corpse rose swift and stealthy from the bed where it lay. I stood without the window, frozen, helpless, and the ghastly thing stole upon the unknowing girl, with frightful eyes burning with Hellish light and snaky arms outstretched. Then, she woke and screamed and then–oh Mother of God!–the dead man lapped her in his terrible arms and she died without a sound.”

Gower’s voice died out into incoherent gibberings and he rocked the dead girl gently to and fro like a mother with a child.

Tom Leary shook him:

“Where is the corpse?”

“He fled into the night,” said John Gower tonelessly.

Men looked at each other bewildered.

“He lies,” muttered they, deep in their beards. “He has slain Margeret himself and hidden the corpse somewhere to bear out his ghastly tale.”

A sullen snarl shook the throng and as one man they turned and looked where, on Hangman’s Hill overlooking the bay, Lie-lip Canool’s bleached skeleton glimmered against the stars.

They took the dead girl from Gower's arms, though he clung to her, and laid her gently on the bed between the candles meant for Adam Falcon. Still she lay and white, and men and women whispered that she seemed more like one drowned than one crushed to death.

We bore John Gower through the village streets, he not resisting but seeming to walk in a daze, muttering to himself. But in the square, Tom Leary halted.

"This is a strange tale Gower told us," said he. "And doubtless a lie. Still, I am not a man to be hanging another without certainty. Therefore let us place him in the stocks for safe-keeping, while we search for Adam's corpse. Time enough for hanging afterwards."

So this was done and as we turned away I looked back upon John Gower who sat, head bowed upon his breast, like a man who is weary unto death.

So under the dim wharfs and in the attics of houses and among stranded hulls we searched for Adam Falcon's corpse. Back up into the hills behind the town our hunt led us, where we broke up into groups and couples and scattered out over the barren downs.

My companion was Michael Hansen, and we had gotten so far apart that the darkness cloaked him from me, when he gave a sudden shout. I started toward him and then the shout broke into a shriek and the shriek died off into grisly silence. Michael Hansen lay dead on the earth and a dim form slunk away in the gloom as I stood above the corpse, my flesh crawling.

Tom Leary and the rest came on the run and gathered about, swearing that John Gower had done this deed also.

"He has escaped, somehow, from the stocks," said they, and we legged it for the village at top speed.

Aye, John Gower had escaped from the stocks and from his townsmen's hate and from all the sorrows of life. He sat as we had left him, head bowed upon his breast, but One had come to him in the darkness and, though all his bones were broken, he seemed like a drowned man.

Then stark horror fell like a thick fog on Faring town. We clustered about the stocks, struck silent, till shrieks from a house on the outskirts of the village told us that the horror had struck again and, rushing there, we found red destruction and death. And a maniac woman who whimpered before she died that Adam Falcon's corpse had broken through the window, flaming-eyed and horrible, to rend and slay. A green slime fouled the room and fragments of sea-weed clung to the window sill.

Then fear, unreasoning and shameless, took possession of the men of Faring town and they fled to their separate houses where they locked and bolted doors and windows and crouched behind them, weapons trembling in their hands and black terror in their souls. For what weapon can slay the dead?

And through that deathly night, horror stalked through Faring town, and hunted the sons of men. Men shuddered and dared not even look forth when the crash of a door or window told of the entrance of the fiend into some wretch's cottage, when shrieks and gibberings told of its grisly deeds therein.

Yet there was one man who did not shut himself behind doors to be there slaughtered like a sheep. I was never a brave man, nor was it courage that sent me out into the ghastly night. No, it was the driving power of a Thought, a Thought which had birth in my brain as I looked on the dead face of Michael Hansen. A vague and illusive thing it was, a hovering and an almost-being, but not quite. Somewhere at the back of my skull It lurked and I could not rest until I had proved or disproved that which I could not even formulate into a concrete theory.

So with my brain in strange and chaotic condition I stole through the shadows, warily. Mayhap the sea, strange and fickle even to her chosen, had whispered something to my inner mind, had betrayed her own.

I know not.

But all through the dark hours I prowled along the beach and when, in the first grey light of the early dawn, a fiendish shape came striding down to the shore, I was waiting there.

To all seeming it was Adam Falcon's corpse, animated by some horrid life, which fronted me there in the grey gloom. The eyes were open now and they glimmered with a cold light, like the reflections of some deep-sea Hell.

And I knew that it was not Adam Falcon who faced me.

"Sea fiend," I said in an unsteady voice, "I know not how you came by Adam Falcon's apparel. I know not whether his ship went upon the rocks, or whether he fell overboard, or whether you climbed up the strake and over the rail and dragged him from his own deck. Nor do I know by what foul ocean magic you twisted your devil's features into a likeness of his.

"But this I know: Adam Falcon sleeps in peace beneath the blue tides. You are not he. That I suspected–now I know. This horror has come upon the earth of yore–so long ago that all men have forgotten the tales–all except such as I, whom men name fool. I know, and knowing, I fear you not, and here I slay you, for though you are not human, you may be slain by a man who does not fear you–even though that man be only a youth and considered strange and foolish. You have left your demon's mark upon the land; God alone knows how many souls you have reft, how many brains you have shattered this night. The ancients said your kind could do harm only in the form of men, on land. Aye, you tricked the sons of men–were borne into their midst by kind and gentle hands–by men who knew not they carried a monster from the abysses.

"Now, you have worked your will, and the sun will soon rise. Before that time you must be far below the green waters, basking in the accursed caverns that human eye has never looked upon save in death.

There lies the sea and safety; I bar the way alone."

He came upon me like a towering wave and his arms were like green serpents about me. I knew they were crushing me, yet I felt as if I were drowning instead, and even then understood the expression that had puzzled me on Michael Hansen's face–that of a drowned man.

I was looking into the inhuman eyes of the monster and it was as if I gazed into untold depths of oceans–depths into which I should presently tumble

and drown. And I felt scales–

Neck, arm and shoulder he gripped me, bending me back to break my spine, and I drove my knife into his body again–and again–and again. He roared once, the only sound I ever heard him make, and it was like the roar of the tides among the shoals. Like the pressure of a hundred fathoms of green water was the grasp upon my body and limbs and then, as I thrust again, he gave way and crumpled to the beach.

He lay there writhing and then was still, and already he had begun to change. Mermen, the ancients named his kind, knowing they were endowed with strange attributes, one of which was the ability to take the full form of a man if lifted from the ocean by the hands of men. I bent and tore the human clothing from the thing. And the first gleams of the sun fell upon a slimy and moldering mass of sea-weed, from which stared two hideous dead eyes–a formless bulk that lay at the water's edge, where the first high wave would bear it back to that from which it came, the cold jade ocean deeps.

A Legend of Faring Town

Her house, a moulting buzzard on the Hill

Loomed gaunt and brooding over Faring town;

Behind, there sloped away the barren down

And at its foot an ancient, crumbling mill.

And often in the evening bleak and still,

With withered limbs wrapped in a sombre gown

And leathery face set in a sombre frown,

She sat in silence on her silent sill.

She came to Faring town long years ago–

With her a winsome child, the ancients said,

She vanished, where, the people did not know–

Meg mended ropes for ocean vessels' sails

And let the people think the child was dead–

She did not speak, but there were darksome tales.

One night the village flamed with sudden red–

From off Meg's roof we saw the cinders stream.

She came not forth–we entered–and in the gleam,

Saw her crouching, like a thing of dread,

Above a skeleton within her bed.

"Child slayer!" I still hear the women scream–

High a red and cinder spitting beam;

We hanged her and the flames consumed the dead.

A book we found, and written piteously

In Meg's sad scrawl: "Today my darling died

"But she shall sleep forever by my side–

"They shall not give her to the cruel sea."

We cringed and gazed in terror and in shame

Where still a form swung black against the flame.

Restless Waters

As if it were yesterday, I remember that terrible night in the Silver Slipper, in the late fall of 1845.

Outside, the wind roared in an icy gale and the sleet drove with it, till it rattled against the windows like the knucklebones of a skeleton. As we sat about the tavern fire, we could hear, booming above the wind and the sleet, the thunder of the white surges that beat frenziedly against the stark New England coast.

The ships in the harbor of the little seaport town lay double anchored, and the captains sought the warmth and companionship to be found in the wharf-side taverns.

There in the Silver Slipper that night were four men and I, the tap boy. There was Ezra Harper, the host; John Gower, captain of the *Sea-Woman*; Jonas Hopkins, a lawyer out of Salem; and Captain Starkey of *The Vulture*. These four men sat about the heavy oaken table in front of the great fire which roared in the fireplace, and I scurried about the tavern attending to their wants, filling mugs, and heating spiced drinks.

Captain Starkey sat with his back to the fire facing a window whereon the sleet beat and rattled. Ezra Harper sat at his right, at the end of the table, Captain Gower sat at the other end, and the lawyer, Jonas Hopkins, sat directly opposite Starkey, with his back to the window and facing the fire.

“More brandy!” Starkey roared, hammering the table with his great knotty fist. He was a rough giant of a man in middle life, with a short thick black beard and eyes that gleamed from beneath heavy black brows.

“A cold night for them that sail the sea,” said Ezra Harper.

“A colder night for the men that sleep below the sea,” said John Gower moodily. He was a tall rangy man, dark and saturnine of countenance, a strange wayward man of whom dark tales were told.

Starkey laughed savagely. “If you’re thinking of Tom Siler, you’d best save your sympathy. Earth is the gainer for his going, and the sea is no better for it. A vile, murdering mutineer!” he roared the last in a sudden fury and

smote the table resoundingly, glaring about as if to challenge any to dispute him.

A mocking smile flitted across the sinister countenance of John Gower, and Jonas Hopkins leaned forward, his keen eyes boring into Starkey's. Like all of us, he knew the story of Tom Siler, as told by Captain Starkey: how Siler, first mate aboard *The Vulture*, had sought to incite the crew to mutiny and piracy, had been tricked by Starkey and hanged at sea. Those were hard days and the captain's word was law at sea.

"Strange," said Jonas Hopkins, with his thin colorless face thrust at Captain Starkey. "Strange that Tom Siler should turn out bad, and him such a law abiding lad before this."

Starkey merely grunted disdainfully and emptied his cup. He was already drunk.

"When does your niece, Betty, marry Joseph Harmer, captain?" asked Ezra Harper, seeking to change the subject into safer channels. Jonas Hopkins sank back in his seat and turned his attention to his rum.

"Tomorrow," snarled Starkey.

Gower laughed shortly. "Is it a wife or a daughter Joe Harmer wants that he's marrying a girl so much younger than he?"

"John Gower, you'll oblige me by attending to your own cursed business!" roared Starkey. "The hussy should be overjoyed to be marrying a man like Harmer, who is one of the wealthiest ship owners in New England."

"But Betty doesn't think so, does she?" persisted John Gower, as if intent on stirring up trouble. "She's still sorrowing for Dick Hansen, isn't she?"

Captain Starkey's hairy hands clenched into fists and he glared at Gower as if this questioning of his private affairs was too much. Then he gulped down his rum and slammed the mug down on the board.

“There’s no accounting for the whims of a girl,” he said moodily. “If she wants to waste her life lamenting a wastrel who ran away and got himself drowned, that’s her business. But it’s my affair to see she marries properly.”

“And how much is Joe Harmer paying you, Starkey?” asked John Gower bluntly.

This passed the point of civility and discretion. Starkey’s huge body heaved up out of his seat and, with a bellow, he leaned across the table, eyes red with drink and fury, and his iron fist lifted. Gower did not move, but sat smiling up at him slit-eyed and dangerous.

“Sit down, Starkey!” Ezra Harper interposed. “John, the devil’s in you tonight. Why can’t we all take our liquor together friendly-like–”

This philosophical discourse was cut short abruptly. The heavy door was suddenly thrown open, a rush of wind made the candle dance and flicker wildly, and in the swirl of sleet that burst in, we saw a girl standing. I sprang forward and shut the door behind her.

“Betty!”

The girl was slim, almost frail. Her large dark eyes stared wildly, and her pretty pale face was streaked with tears. Her hair fell loose about her slender shoulders and her garments were soaked and battered by the gale through which she had battled her way.

“Betty!” roared Captain Starkey. “I thought you were at home in bed! What are you doing here–and on a night like this?”

“Oh, uncle!” she cried, holding her arms out to him blindly, oblivious to the rest of us. “I came to tell you again! I can’t marry Joseph Harmer tomorrow! I can’t! It’s Dick Hansen! He’s calling to me through the wind and the night and the black waters! Alive or dead, I’m his till I die, and I can’t–I can’t–”

“Get out!” roared Starkey, stamping and brandishing his arms like a maniac. “Out with you and back to your room! I’ll attend to you later! Be silent!

You'll marry Joe Harmer tomorrow or I'll beat you to death!"

With a whimper she sank to her knees before him, and with a bellow he raised his huge fist as if to strike her. But with one cat-like movement John Gower was out of his seat and had hurled the enraged captain back upon the table.

"Keep your hands off me, you damned pirate!" shouted Starkey furiously.

Gower grinned bleakly. "That's yet to be proven," said he. "But lay a finger on this child and we'll see how quick a 'damned pirate' can cut the heart out of an honest merchantman who's selling his own blood and kin to a miser."

"Let be, John," Ezra Harper interposed. "Starkey, don't you see the girl's in a fair way to collapse?

Here, honey," he bent and lifted her gently, "come with old Ezra. There's a warm fire in an upper room, and my wife shall give you some dry clothes. It's a bitter night for a girl to be out in. You'll stay with us till morning, dearie."

He went up the stair, half carrying the girl; and Starkey, after staring after them for a moment, returned to the table. There was silence awhile, and then Jonas Hopkins, who had not moved out of his seat, said:

"Strange tales making the rounds, Captain Starkey."

"And what might they be?" asked Starkey defiantly.

Jonas Hopkins stuffed his long slim-stemmed pipe with Virginia tobacco before he answered.

"I talked with some of your crew today."

"Huh!" Starkey spat out an oath. "My ship makes port this morning and before night the gossips are at work."

Hopkins beckoned me for a coal for his pipe. I obliged, and he took several long puffs.

“Mayhap they have something to work on this time, Captain Starkey.”

“Speak up, man!” said Starkey angrily. “What are you driving at?”

“They say on board *The Vulture* that Tom Siler was never guilty of mutiny. They say that you trumped up the charges and hanged him out of hand in spite of the protests of the crew.”

Starkey laughed savagely but hollowly. “And what basis for this wild tale?”

“They say that as he stood on the threshold of Eternity, Tom Siler swore that you were murdering him because he had learned what became of Dick Hansen. But before he could say more, the noose shut off his words and his life.”

“Dick Hansen!” Starkey’s face was pale, but his tone still defiant. “Dick Hansen was last seen on the wharfs of Salem one night over a year ago. What have I to do with him?”

“You wanted Betty to marry Joe Harmer, who was ready to buy her like a slave from you,” answered Jonas Hopkins calmly. “This much is known by all.”

John Gower nodded agreement.

“She was to marry Dick Hansen, though, and you had him shanghaied on board a British whaler bound on a four year cruise. Then you spread the report that he had been drowned and tried to rush Betty into marrying Harmer against her will, before Hansen could return. When you learned that Siler knew and would tell Betty, you became desperate. I know that you are on the verge of bankruptcy. Your only chance was the money Harmer had promised you. You murdered Tom Siler to still his mouth.”

Another silence fell. Outside in the black night, the wind rose to a shriek. Starkey twisted his great fingers together and sat silent and brooding.

“And can you prove all this?” he sneered at last.

“I can prove that you are nearly bankrupt and that Harmer promised you money; I can prove that you had Hansen done away with.”

“But you can’t prove that Siler was not contemplating mutiny,” shouted Starkey. “And how can you prove Hansen was shanghaied?”

“This morning I received a letter from my agent who had just arrived in Boston,” said Hopkins. “He had seen Hansen in an Asiatic seaport. The young man said that he intended deserting ship at the first opportunity, and returning to America. He asked that Betty be acquainted with the fact that he was alive and still loved her.”

Starkey rested his elbows on the table and sank his chin on his fists, like a man who sees his castles falling about him and red ruin facing him. Then he shook his mighty shoulders and laughed savagely. He drained his cup and reeled to his feet, bellowing with sudden laughter.

“I’ve still a card or two in my hand!” he shouted. “Tom Siler’s in Hell with a noose around his neck, and Dick Hansen’s across the world! The girl’s my ward and a minor, and she’ll marry whoever I say. You can’t prove what you say about Siler. My word’s law on the high seas, and you can’t call me to account for anything I do aboard my own ship. As for Dick Hansen–my niece will be safely married to Joe Harmer long before that young fool gets back from his cruise. Go tell her if you like. Go tell her Dick Hansen still lives!”

“That’s what I intend to do,” said Jonas Hopkins, rising. “And should have done so before now, had I not wished to face you with the facts first.”

“Great good it will do!” yelled Starkey like a wild man. He seemed like some savage beast at bay, defying us all. His eyes flamed terribly from under his craggy brows, and his fingers were crooked like talons. He snatched a goblet of liquor from the table and waved it.

“Aye, go tell her! She’ll marry Harmer, or I’ll kill her. Contrive and plot, you yellow-spined swine, no living man can balk me now, and no living man can save her from being the wife of Joe Harmer!

“Here’s a toast, you cringing cowards! I’ll drink to Tom Siler, sleeping in the cold white sea with the noose about his traitor’s neck. Here’s to my mate, Tom Siler, a-spinning and a-twirling from the cross-trees–”

This was insanity; I shrank back from the blast of the man’s hideous triumph, and even from John Gower’s face the smile was missing.

“To Tom Siler!” The winds answered the roar. The sleet drummed with frantic fingers on the window as if the black night itself sought entrance. I shrank near to the fire behind Captain Starkey’s back, yet an unearthly coldness stole over me, as if through a suddenly opened door, a wind from some other sphere had breathed upon me.

“To Tom Siler–” Captain Starkey’s arm went up with the goblet, his eyes, following the motion, rested on the window that separated us from the outer darkness. He froze, eyes starting from his head. The goblet dropped unheeded from his hand, and with one deathly scream he pitched forward across the table– *dead!*

What killed him? Too much drink and the fire in his evil brain, they said. Yet–Jonas Hopkins had turned toward the stairs and John Gower’s eyes were fixed on Starkey’s face. Only I looked toward the window and saw there what blasted Captain Starkey’s brain and blew out his life as a witch blows out a candle. And the sight has haunted me to this day and will haunt me to the day of my death.

The window was rimed with frost and the candles gleamed illusively against it, for a moment I saw it clearly: a shadowy, nebulous shape that was like the reflection of a man’s form in restless water. *And the face was that of Tom Siler, and about the neck was a shadowy noose!*

The Shadow of the Beast

As long as evil stars arise

Or moonlight fires the East,

May God in Heaven preserve us from

The Shadow of the Beast!

The horror had its beginning in the crack of a pistol in a black hand. A white man dropped with a bullet in his chest and the negro who had fired the shot turned and fled, after a single hideous threat hurled at the pale-faced girl who stood horror-struck close by.

Within an hour grim-faced men were combing the pine woods with guns in their hands, and on through the night the grisly hunt went on, while the victim of the hunted lay fighting for his life.

“He’s quiet now; they say he’ll live,” his sister said, as she came out of the room where the boy lay. Then she sank down into a chair and gave way to a burst of tears.

I sat down beside her and soothed her much as one would a child. I loved her and she had shown that she returned my affection. It was my love for her that had drawn me from my Texas ranch to the lumber camps in the shadow of the pine woods, where her brother looked after the interests of his company.

“Give me the details of all this,” I said. “I haven’t been able to get a coherent account of it. You know I arrived after Harry had been shot.”

“There isn’t much to tell,” she answered listlessly. “This negro’s name is Joe Cagle and he’s bad–in every sense of the word. Twice I’ve seen him peering in my window, and this morning he sprang out from behind a pile of lumber and caught me by the arm. I screamed and Harry rushed up and struck him with a club. Then Cagle shot my brother, and snarling like a wild beast, promised to revenge himself on me, also. Then he dashed away among the trees on the edge of the camp, looking like a great black ape with his broad back and stooping gait.”

“What threats did he make against you?” I asked, my hands involuntarily clenching.

“He said he’d come back and get me some night when the woods were dark,” she answered wearily, and with a fatalism that surprized and

dismayed me she added, “He will, too. When a negro like him sets his mind on a white girl, nothing but death can stop him.”

“Then death will stop him,” I said harshly, rising. “Do you think I’m going to sit here and let that black beast menace you? I’m going to join the posse. Don’t you leave this house tonight. By morning Joe Cagle will be past harming any girl, white or black.”

As I went out of the house I met one of the men who had been searching for the negro. He had sprained his ankle on a hidden root in the darkness and had returned to the camp on a borrowed horse.

“Naw, we ain’t found no trace yet,” he replied to my question. “We’ve done combed the country right around the camp, and the boys are spreading out towards the swamp. Don’t look reasonable that he coulda got so far away with the short start he had, and us right after him on horse back, but Joe Cagle’s more of a varmint than he is a man. Looks like one uh these gorillas. I imagine he’s hidin’ in the swamp and if he is, it may take weeks to rout him out. Like I said, we’ve done searched the woods close by–all except the Deserted House, uh course.”

“Why not there?–And where is this house?”

“Down the old tote road what ain’t used no more, ’bout four miles. Aw, they ain’t a black in the country that’d go near that place, to save his life, even. That negro that killed the foreman a few years ago, they chased him down the old tote road and when he seen he was goin’ to have to go right past the Deserted House, he turned back and give up to the mob. No sir, Joe Cagle ain’t nowheres near that house, you can bet.”

“Why has it such a bad name?” I asked curiously.

“Ain’t nobody lived in it for twenty years. Last man owned it leaped, fell or was thrown out of a upstairs window one night and was killed by the fall. Later a young travellin’ man stayed there all night on a bet and they found him outside the house next mornin’, all smashed up like he’d fell a long ways. A backwoodsman who’d passed that way late in the night swore he’d heard a terrible scream, and then seen the travellin’ man come flyin’ out of a

second story window. He didn't wait to see no more. What give the Deserted House the bad name in the first place was–"

But I was in no mood to listen to a long drawn-out ghost story, or whatever the man was about to tell me. Almost every locality in the South has its "ha'nted" house and the tales attached to each are numberless.

I interrupted him to ask where I would be likely to find the part of the posse which had penetrated most deeply into the pine woods, and having gotten instructions, I mounted the horse he had ridden back and rode away, first getting his promise that he would keep watch over the girl, Joan, until I had returned.

"Don't get lost," he shouted after me. "Them piney woods is risky business for a stranger. Watch for the light of the posse's torches through the trees."

A brisk canter brought me to the verge of a road which led into the woods in the direction I wished to go, and there I halted. Another road, one which was little more than a dimly defined path, led away at right angles. This was the old tote road which went past the Deserted House. I hesitated. I had none of the confidence that the others had shown, that Joe Cagle would shun the place. The more I thought of it, the more I felt it likely that the negro would take refuge there. From all accounts, he was an unusual man, a complete savage, so bestial, so low in the scale of intelligence that even the superstitions of his race left him untouched. Why then should not his animal craft bid him hide in the last place his pursuers would think of looking, while that same animal-like nature caused him to scorn the fears possessed by the more imaginative of his race?

My decision reached, I reined my steed about and started down the old road.

There is no darkness in the world so utterly devoid of light as the blackness of the pine woods. The silent trees rose like basaltic walls about me, shutting out the stars. Except for the occasional eery sigh of the wind through the branches, or the far away, haunting cry of an owl, the silence was as absolute as the darkness. The stillness bore heavily upon me. I seemed to sense, in the blackness about me, the spirit of the unconquerable

swamplands, the primitive foe of man whose abysmal savagery still defies his vaunted civilization. In such surroundings anything seems possible. I did not then wonder at the dark tales of black magic and voo-doo rites attributed to these horrid depths, nor would I have been surprized to hear the throb of the tomtom, or to see a fire leap up in the dark, where naked figures danced about a cannibalistic feast.

I shrugged my shoulders to rid myself of such thoughts. If voo-doo worshippers secretly held their fearsome rites in these woods, there were none tonight with the vengeful white men combing the country.

As my mount, bred in the pine country and sure-footed as a cat in the darkness, picked his way without my aid, I strained my senses to catch any sound such as a man might make. But not one stealthy footfall reached me, not a single rustle of the scanty underbrush. Joe Cagle was armed and desperate. He might be waiting in ambush; might spring on me at any moment, but I felt no especial fear. In that veiling darkness, he could see no better than I, and I would have as good a chance as he in a blind exchange of shots. And if it came to a hand-to-hand conflict, I felt that I, with my two hundred and five pounds of bone and sinew, was a match for even the ape-like negro.

Surely I must be close to the Deserted House by now. I had no idea of knowing the exact time, but far away in the east a faint glow began to be apparent through the masking blackness of the pines. The moon was rising. And on that instant, from somewhere in front of me, rattled a sudden volley of shots, then silence fell again like a heavy fog. I had halted short and now I hesitated. To me it had sounded as if all the reports had come from the same gun, and there had been no answering shots. What had happened out there in the grim darkness? Did those shots spell Joe Cagle’s doom, or did they mean that the negro had struck again? Or did the sounds have any connection with the man I was hunting? There was but one way to find out and nudging my mount’s ribs, I started on again at a swifter gait.

A few moments later a large clearing opened and a gaunt dark building bulked against the stars. The Deserted House at last! The moon glimmered evilly through the trees, etching out black shadows and throwing an illusive witch-light over the country. I saw, in this vague light, that the house had

once been a mansion of the old colonial type. Sitting in my saddle for an instant before I dismounted, a vision of lost glory passed before my mind–a vision of broad plantations, singing negroes, aristocratic Southern colonels, balls, dances–gallantry–

All gone now. Blotted out by the Civil War. The pine trees grew where the plantation fields had flourished, the gallants and the ladies were long dead and forgotten, the mansion crumbled into decay and ruin–and now what grim threat lurked in those dark and dusty rooms where the mice warred with the owls?

I swung from my saddle, and as I did, my horse snorted suddenly and reared back violently upon his haunches, tearing the reins from my hand. I snatched for them again, but he wheeled and galloped away, vanishing like a goblin's shadow in the gloom. I stood struck speechless, listening to the receding thunder of his hoofs, and I will admit that a cold finger traced its way down my spine. It is rather a grisly experience to have your retreat suddenly cut off, in such surroundings as I was in.

However, I had not come to run away from danger, so I strode boldly up to the broad veranda, a heavy pistol in one hand, an electric flash-light in the other. The massive pillars towered above me; the door sagged open upon broken hinges. I swept the broad hallway with a gleam of light but only dust and decay met my eyes. I entered warily, turning the light off.

As I stood there, trying to accustom my eyes to the gloom, I realized that I was doing as reckless a thing as a man could do. If Joe Cagle were hiding somewhere in the house, all he had to do would be to wait until I turned on my light and then shoot me full of lead. But I thought again of his threats against the weak and helpless girl I loved, and my determination was steeled. If Joe Cagle was in that house, he was going to die.

I strode toward the stairs, instinctively feeling that if there, the fugitive would be somewhere in the second story. I groped my way up and came out on a landing, lit by the moonlight which streamed in at a window. The dust lay thick on the floor as if undisturbed for two decades and I heard the whisper of bats' wings and the scampering of mice. No foot prints in the

dust betrayed a man's presence but I felt sure that there were other stairways. Cagle might have come into the house through a window.

I went down the hallway, which was a horrible system of black lurking shadows and squares of moonlight–for now the moon had risen high enough to flood in at the windows. There was no sound save the cushioned tread of my own feet in the deep dust on the floor. Room after room I passed, but my flashlight showed only moldered walls, sagging ceilings and broken furniture. At last, close to the end of the corridor, I came to a room whose door was shut. I halted, an intangible feeling working upon me to steel my nerves and send the blood racing through my veins. Somehow, I knew that on the other side of that door lay something mysterious and menacing.

Cautiously I turned on the light. The dust in front of the door was disturbed. An arc of the floor was brushed bare, just in front. The door had been open; had been closed only a short time before. I tried the knob warily, wincing at the rattle it made and expecting a blast of lead through the door. Silence reigned.

I tore the door open and leaped quickly aside.

There was no shot, no sound. Crouching, gun cocked, I peered about the jamb and strained my eyes into the room. A faint acrid scent met my nostrils–gun powder–was it in this room that had been fired those shots I had heard?

Moonlight streamed over a broken window sill, lending a vague radiance. I saw a dark bulky form, that had the semblance of a man, lying close to the center of the floor. I crossed the threshold, bent over the figure and turned my light full into the upturned face.

Joan need never fear Joe Cagle's threats again, for the shape on the floor was Joe Cagle and he was dead.

Close to his outstretched hand lay a revolver, the chambers of which were filled with empty shells. Yet there was no wound upon the negro–at whom had he fired and what had killed him? A second glance at his distorted

features told me–I saw that look once before in the eyes of a man struck by a rattlesnake, who died with fear before the reptile's venom could kill him. Cagle's mouth gaped, his dead eyes stared hideously; he had died of fright, but what grisly thing had caused that fright? At the thought cold sweat started out on my brow and the short hairs prickled at the base of my skull. I was suddenly aware of the silence and solitude of the place and the hour. Somewhere in the house a rat squeaked and I started violently.

I glanced up, then halted, frozen. Moonlight fell on the opposite wall and suddenly a shadow fell silently across it–I bounded to my feet, whirling toward the outer door as I did so. The doorway stood empty. I sprang across the room and went through another door, closing it behind me. Then I halted, shaken. Not a sound broke the stillness. What was it that had stood for an instant in the doorway opening into the hall, throwing its shadow into the room where I had stood? I was still trembling with a nameless fear. The thought of some desperate man was bad enough, but the glance I had had of that shadow had left upon my soul an impression of something strange and unholy– *inhuman!*

The room in which I now was also opened in the hallway. I started to cross to the hall door and then hesitated at the thought of pitting my powers against whatever lurked in the outer darkness. The door sagged open–I saw nothing, but to my soul-freezing horror, *a hideous shadow fell across the floor and moved toward me!*

Etched blackly in the moonlight on the floor, it was as if some frightful shape stood in the doorway, throwing its lengthened and distorted shade across the boards to my feet. Yet I swear that the doorway was empty!

I rushed across the room and entered the door that opened into the next room. Still I was adjacent to the hallway. All these upstairs rooms seemed to open into the hall. I stood, shivering, my revolver gripped so tightly in my sweating hand that the barrel shook like a leaf. The pounding of my heart sounded thunderously in the silence. What in God's name was this horror which was hunting me through these dark rooms? What was it that threw a shadow, when its own substance was unseen? Silence lay like a dark mist; the ghostly radiance of the moon patterned the floor. Two rooms away lay

the corpse of a man who had seen a thing so unnamably terrible that it had shattered his brain and taken away his life.

And here stood I, alone with the unknown monster.

What was that? The creak of ancient hinges! I shrank back against the wall, my blood freezing. The door through which I had just come was slowly opening! A sudden gust of wind shuddered through. The door swung wide, but I, nerving myself to meet the sight of some horror framed in the opening, saw nothing!

Moonlight, as in all of the rooms on this side of the hall, streamed through the hall door and lay on the opposite wall. If any invisible thing was coming from that adjoining room, the moonlight was not at its back. Yet a distorted shadow fell across the wall which shone in the moonlight and moved forward.

Now I saw it clearly, though the angle at which it was thrown deformed it. A broad, shambling figure, stooped, head thrust forward, long man-like arms dangling–the whole thing was hideously suggestive of the human, yet fearsomely unlike. This I read in the approaching shadow, yet saw no solid form that might throw this shadow.

Then panic seized me and I jerked the trigger again and again, filling the empty house with crashing reverberations and the acrid smell of powder, aiming first at the doorway in front of me, then in desperation sending the last bullet straight into the gliding shadow. Just so Joe Cagle must have done in the last terrible moment which preceded his death. The hammer fell hollowly on a discharged shell and I hurled the empty gun wildly. Not an instant had halted the unseen thing–now the shadow was close upon me.

My back-flung hands encountered the door–tore at the knob. It held! The door was locked! Now on the wall beside me, the shadow loomed up black and horrific. Two great treelike arms were raised–with a scream I hurled my full weight against the door. It gave way with a splintering crash and I fell through into the room beyond.

The rest is nightmare. I scrambled up without a glance behind me and rushed into the hall. At the far end I saw, as through a fog, the stair landing and toward it I rushed. The hall was long–it seemed endless. It seemed as though it stretched into Eternity and that I fled for hours down that grisly corridor. And a black shadow kept pace with me, flying along the moonlit wall, vanishing for an instant in black darkness, reappearing an instant later in a square of moonlight, let in by some outer window.

Down the hall it kept by my side, falling upon the wall at my left, telling me that whatever thing threw that shadow, was close at my back. It has long been said that a ghost will fling a shadow in the moonlight, even when it itself is invisible to the human sight. But no man ever lived whose ghost could throw such a silhouette. Such thoughts as these did not enter my mind tangibly as I fled; I was in the grip of unreasoning fear, but piercing through the fogs of my horror, was the knowledge that I was faced by some supernatural thing, which was at once unearthly and bestial.

Now I was almost at the stair; *but now the shadow fell in front of me!* The thing was at my very back–was reaching hideous unseen arms to clutch me! One swift glance over my shoulder showed me something else: *on the dust of the corridor, close upon the footprints I left, other footprints were forming!* Huge misshapen footprints, that left the marks of talons! With a terrible scream I swerved to the right, leaping for an open outer window as a drowning man seizes a rope–without conscious thought.

My shoulder struck the side of the window; I felt empty air under my feet–caught one whirling, chaotic glimpse of the moon, sky and the dark pine trees, as the earth rushed up to meet me, then black oblivion crashed about me.

My first sensation of returning consciousness was of soft hands lifting my head and caressing my face. I lay still, my eyes closed, trying to orient myself–I could not remember where I was, or what had happened. Then with a rush it all came back to me. My eyes flared open and I struggled wildly to rise.

“Steve, oh Steve, are you hurt?”

Surely I was insane, for it was the voice of Joan! No! My head was cradled in her lap, her large dark eyes, bright with tears, gazed down into mine.

“Joan! In God’s name, what are you doing here?” I sat up, drawing her into my arms. My head throbbed nauseatingly; I was sore and bruised. Above us rose the stark grim wall of the Deserted House, and I could see the window from which I had fallen. I must have lain senseless for a long time, for now the moon lay red as blood close to the western horizon, glimmering in a scarlet wallow through the tops of the pines.

“The horse you rode away came back riderless. I couldn’t stand to sit and wait–so I slipt out of the house and came here. They told me you’d gone to find the posse, but the horse came back the old tote road. There wasn’t anyone to send so I slipt away and came myself.”

“Joan!” the sight of her forlorn figure and the thought of her courage and love took hold of my heart and I kissed her without speaking.

“Steve,” her voice came low and frightened, “what happened to you? When I rode up, you lay here unconscious, just like those other two men who fell from those windows–only they were killed.”

“And only pure chance saved me, despite my powerful frame and heavy bones,” I answered. “Once out of a hundred times a fall like that fails to injure a man–Joan, what happened in that house twenty years ago to throw a curse upon it?”

She shivered. “I don’t know. The people who owned it before the war had to sell it afterwards. The tenants let it fall into disrepair, of course. A strange thing happened there just before the death of the last tenant. A huge gorilla escaped from a circus which was passing through the country and took refuge in the house. He fought so terribly when they tried to recapture him that they had to kill him. That was over twenty years ago. Shortly after that, the owner of the house fell from an upstairs window and was killed.

Everyone supposed he committed suicide or was walking in his sleep, but–”

“No!” I broke in with a shudder. “He was being hunted through those horrible rooms by a thing so terrible that death itself was an escape. And that travelling man–I know what killed him–and Joe Cagle–”

“Joe Cagle!” she started violently. “Where–”

“Don’t worry, child,” I soothed. “He’s past harming you. Don’t ask me any more. No, I didn’t kill him; his death was more horrible than any I could have dealt. There are worlds and shadows of worlds beyond our ken, and bestial earth-bound spirits lurk in the dark shadows of our world, it may be. Come, let us go.”

She had brought two horses with her, and had tethered them a short distance from the house. I made her mount and then, despite her protests and pleas, I returned to the house. I went only as far as a first story window and I stayed only a few moments. Then I also mounted, and together we rode slowly down the old tote road. The stars were paling and the east was beginning to whiten with the coming morn.

“You have not told me what haunts that house,” said Joan in an awed voice, “but I know it’s something frightful; what are we to do?”

For answer I turned in my saddle and pointed. We had rounded a bend in the old road and could just glimpse the old house through the trees. As we looked, a red lance of flame leaped up, smoke billowed to the morning sky, and a few minutes later a deep roar came to us, as the whole building began to fall into the insatiate flames I had started before we left. The ancients have always maintained that fire is the final destroyer, and I knew as I watched, that the ghost of the dead gorilla was lain, and the shadow of the beast forever lifted from the pine lands.

The Dead Slaver’s Tale

Dim and grey was the silent sea,

Dim was the crescent moon;

From the jungle back of the shadowed lea

Came a tom-tom’s eerie croon

When we glutted the waves with a hundred slaves

From a Jekra barracoon.

Our way to bar, a man of war

Was sailing with canvas full;

So the doomed men up from the hold we bore,

Hacked them to pieces and hurled them o’er,

And we heard the grim sharks as they tore

The flesh from each sword-cleft skull.

Then fast we fled toward the rising sun

But we could not flee the dead

And ever behind our flying ship

Wavered a trail of red.

She sank like a stone off Calabar

With all of her bloody crew.

There was no breeze to shake a spar,

No reef her hull to hew.

But dusky hands rose out of the deep,

And dragged her under the blue.

Dermod’s Bane

If your heart is sick in your breast and a blind black curtain of sorrow is between your brain and your eyes so that the very sunlight is pale and leprous–go to the city of Galway, in the county of the same name, in the province of Connaught, in the country of Ireland.

In the grey old City of Tribes, as they call it, there is a dreamy soothing spell that is like enchantment, and if you are of Galway blood, no matter how far away, your grief will pass slowly from you like a dream, leaving only a sad sweet memory, like the scent of a dying rose. There is a mist of antiquity hovering over the old city which mingles with sorrow and makes one forget. Or you can go out into the blue Connaught hills and feel the salt sharp tang of the wind off the Atlantic, and life seems faint and far away, with all its sharp joys and bitter sorrows, and no more real than the shadows of the clouds which pass.

I came to Galway as a wounded beast crawls back to his lair in the hills. The city of my people broke upon my gaze for the first time, but it did not seem strange or foreign. It seemed like a homecoming to me, and with each day passing the land of my birth seemed farther and farther away and the land of my ancestors closer.

I came to Galway with an aching heart. My twin sister, whom I loved as I never loved anyone else, had died. Her going was swift and unexpected. It seemed to my mazed agony that one moment she was laughing beside me with her cheery smile and bright grey Irish eyes, and the next, the cold bitter grass was growing above her. Oh, my soul to God, not your Son alone endured crucifixion.

A black cloud like a shroud locked about me and in the dim borderland of madness I sat alone, tearless and speechless. My grandmother came to me at last, a great grim old woman, with hard haunted eyes that held all the woes of the Irish race.

“Let you go to Galway, lad. Let you go to the ould land. Maybe the sorrow of you will be drowned in the cold salt sea. Maybe the folk of Connaught can heal the wound that is on you–”

I went to Galway.

Well, the people were kind there–all those great old families, the Martins, the Lynches, the Deanes, the Dorseys, the Blakes, the Kirowans–families of the fourteen great families who rule Galway.

Out on the hills and in the valleys I roved and talked with the kindly, quaint country folk, many of whom still spoke the good old Erse language which I could speak haltingly.

There, on a hill one night before a shepherd's fire I heard again the old legend of Dermod O'Connor. As the shepherd unfolded the terrible tale in his rich brogue, interlaced with many Gaelic phrases, I remembered that my grandmother had told me the tale when I was a child, but I had forgotten the most of it.

Briefly the story is this: there was a chief of the Clan na O'Connor and his name was Dermod, but people called him the Wolf. The O'Connors were kings in the old days, ruling Connaught with a hand of steel.

They divided the rule of Ireland with the O'Briens in the South–Munster–and the O'Neills in the North–Ulster. With the O'Rourkes they fought the MacMurroughs of Leinster and it was Dermot MacMurrough, driven out of Ireland by the O'Connors, who brought in Strongbow and his Norman adventurers. When Earl Pembroke, whom men called Strongbow, landed in Ireland, Roderick O'Connor was king of Ireland in name and claim at least. And the clan O'Connor, fierce Celtic warriors that they were, kept up their struggle for freedom until at last their power was broken by a terrible Norman invasion. All honor to the O'Connors. In the old times my people fought under their banners–but each tree has a rotten root. Each great house has its black sheep. Dermod O'Connor was the black sheep of his clan and a blacker one never lived.

His hand was against all men, even his own house. He was no chieftain, fighting to regain the crown of Erin or to free his people; he was a red-handed reaver and he preyed alike on Norman and Celt; he raided into The Pale and he carried torch and steel into Munster and Leinster. The O'Briens and the O'Carrolls had cause to curse him, and the O'Neills hunted him like a wolf.

He left a trail of blood and devastation wherever he rode and at last, his band dwindling from desertions and constant fighting, he alone remained, hiding in caves and hills, butchering lone travellers for the sheer lust of blood that was on him, and descending on lonely farmers' houses or shepherds' huts to commit atrocities on their women folk. He was a giant of a man and the legends make of him something inhuman and monstrous. It must be truth that he was strange and terrible in appearance.

But his end came at last. He murdered a youth of the Kirowan clan and the Kirowans rode out of the city of Galway with vengeance in their hearts. Sir Michael Kirowan met the marauder alone in the hills–Sir Michael, a direct ancestor of mine, whose very name I bear. Alone they fought with only the shuddering hills to witness that terrible battle, till the clash of steel reached the ears of the rest of the clan who were riding hard and scouring the countryside.

They found Sir Michael badly wounded and Dermod O'Connor dying with a cleft shoulder bone and a ghastly wound in his breast. But such was their fury and hatred, that they flung a noose about the dying robber's neck and hanged him to a great tree on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea.

"And," said my friend the shepherd, stirring the fire, "the peasant folk still point out the tree and call it Dermod's Bane, after the Danish manner, and men have seen the great outlaw o' nights, and him gnashing his great tushes and spouting blood from shoulder and breast and swearin' all manner o' ill on the Kirowans and their blood for all time to come.

"And so, sir, let you not walk in the cliffs over the sea by night for you are of the blood he hates and the same name of the man who felled him is on you. For let you laugh if so be your will, but the ghost of Dermod O'Connor the Wolf is abroad o' dark night and the moon out of the sky, and him with his great black beard and ghastly eyes and boar tushes."

They pointed me out the tree, Dermod's Bane, and strangely like a gallows it looked, standing there as it had stood for how many hundred years I do not know, for men live long in Ireland and trees live longer.

There were no other trees near and the cliff rose sheer from the sea for four hundred feet. Below was only the deep sinister blue of the waves, deep and dark, breaking on the cruel rocks.

I walked much in the hills at night for when the silence of the darkness was on the world and no speech or noises of men to hold my thoughts, my sorrow was dark on my heart again and I walked on the hills where the stars seemed close and warm. And often my mazed brain wondered which star *she* was on, or if she had turned to a star.

One night the old, sharp agony returned unbearably. I rose from my bed–for I was staying at the time in a little mountain inn–and dressed and went into the hills. My temples throbbed and there was an unbearable weight about my heart. My dumb frozen soul shrieked up to God but I could not weep. I felt I must weep or go mad. For never a tear had passed my eyelids since–

Well, I walked on and on, how long or how far I do not know. The stars were hot and red and angry and gave me no comfort that night. At first I wanted to scream and howl and throw myself on the ground and tear the grass with my teeth. Then that passed and I wandered as in a trance. There was no moon and in the dim starlight the hills and their trees loomed dark and strange. Over the summits I could see the great Atlantic lying like a dusky silver monster and I heard her faint roaring.

Something flitted in front of me and I thought that it was a wolf. But there have been no wolves in Ireland for many and many a year. Again I saw the thing, a long low shadowy shape. I followed it mechanically.

Now in front of me I saw a cliff overlooking the sea. On the cliff ’s edge was a single great tree that loomed up like a gibbet. I approached this.

Then in front of me, as I neared the tree, a vague mist hovered. A strange fear spread over me as I watched stupidly. A form became evident. Dim and silky, like a shred of moon-mist, but with an undoubted human shape. A face–I cried out!

A vague, sweet face floated before me, indistinct, mist-like–yet I made out the shimmery mass of dark hair, the high pure forehead, the red curving

lips–the serious soft grey eyes–

“Moira!” I cried in agony and rushed forward, my aching arms spread wide, my heart bursting in my bosom.

She floated away from me like a mist blown by a breeze; now she seemed to waver in space–I felt myself staggering wildly on the very edge of the cliff, whither my blind rush had led me. As a man wakes from a dream I saw in one flashing instant the cruel rocks four hundred feet below, I heard the hungry lapping of the waves–as I felt myself falling forward I saw the vision, but now it was changed hideously.

Great tusk-like teeth gleamed ghoulishly through a matted black beard. Terrible eyes blazed under penthouse brows; blood flowed from a wound in the shoulder and a ghastly gash in the broad breast–

“Dermod O’Connor!” I screamed, my hair bristling. “Avaunt, fiend out of Hell–”

I swayed out for the fall I could not check, with death waiting four hundred feet below. Then a soft small hand closed on my wrist and I was drawn irresistibly back. I fell, but back on the soft green grass at the lip of the cliff, not to the keen-edged rocks and waiting sea below. Oh, I knew–I could not be wrong.

The small hand was gone from my wrist, the hideous face gone from the cliff edge–but that grasp on my wrist that drew me back from my doom–how could I fail to recognize it? A thousand times had I felt the dear touch of that soft hand on my arm or in my own hand. Oh Moira, Moira, pulse of my heart, in life and in death you were ever at my side.

And now for the first time I wept and lying on my face with my face in my hands, I poured my racked heart out in scalding, blinding and soul-easing tears, until the sun came up over the blue Galway hills and limned the branches of Dermod’s Bane with a strange new radiance.

Now, did I dream or was I mad? Did, in truth, the ghost of that long-dead outlaw lead me across the hills to the cliff under the death-tree, and there

assume the shape of my dead sister to lure me to my doom?

And did in truth the real hand of that dead sister, brought suddenly to my side by my peril, hold me back from death?

Believe or disbelieve as you will. To me it is a fact. I saw Dermod O'Connor that night and he led me over the cliff; and the soft hand of Moira Kirowan dragged me back and its touch loosened the frozen channels of my heart and brought me peace. For the wall that bars the living from the dead is but a thin veil, I know now, and so sure as a dead woman's love conquered a dead man's hate, so sure shall I some day in the world beyond, hold my sister in my arms again.

The Hills of the Dead

I

VOODOO

The twigs which N'Longa flung on the fire broke and crackled. The upleaping flames lighted the countenances of the two men. N'Longa, voodoo man of the Slave Coast, was very old. His wizened and gnarled frame was stooped and brittle, his face creased by hundreds of wrinkles. The red firelight glinted on the human finger-bones which composed his necklace.

The other was a white man and his name was Solomon Kane. He was tall and broad-shouldered, clad in black close garments, the garb of the Puritan. His featherless slouch hat was drawn low over his heavy brows, shadowing his darkly pallid face. His cold deep eyes brooded in the firelight.

"You come again, brother," droned the fetish-man, speaking in the jargon which passed for a common language of black man and white on the West Coast. "Many moons burn and die since we make blood-palaver. You go to the setting sun, but you come back!"

"Aye." Kane's voice was deep and almost ghostly. "Yours is a grim land, N'Longa, a red land barred with the black darkness of horror and the

bloody shadows of death. Yet I have returned–”

N’Longa stirred the fire, saying nothing, and after a pause Kane continued.

“Yonder in the unknown vastness”–his long finger stabbed at the black silent jungle which brooded beyond the firelight–“yonder lie mystery and adventure and nameless terror. Once I dared the jungle–once she nearly claimed my bones. Something entered into my blood, something stole into my soul like a whisper of unnamed sin. The jungle! Dark and brooding–over leagues of the blue salt sea she has drawn me and with the dawn I go to seek the heart of her. Mayhap I shall find curious adventure–mayhap my doom awaits me. But better death than the ceaseless and everlasting urge, the fire that has burned my veins with bitter longing.”

“She call,” muttered N’Longa. “At night she coil like serpent about my hut and whisper strange things to me. *Ai ya*! The jungle call. We be blood-brothers, you and I. Me, N’Longa, mighty worker of nameless magic. You go to the jungle as all men go who hear her call. Maybe you live, more like you die. You believe in my fetish work?”

“I understand it not,” said Kane grimly, “but I have seen you send your soul forth from your body to animate a lifeless corpse.”

“Aye! Me N’Longa, priest of the Black God! Now watch, I make magic.”

Kane gazed at the black man who bent over the fire, making even motions with his hands and mumbling incantations. Kane watched and he seemed to grow sleepy. A mist wavered in front of him, through which he saw dimly the form of N’Longa, etched black against the flames. Then all faded out.

Kane awoke with a start, hand shooting to the pistol in his belt. N’Longa grinned at him across the flame and there was a scent of early dawn in the air. The fetish-man held a long stave of curious black wood in his hands. This stave was carved in a strange manner, and one end tapered to a sharp point.

“This voodoo staff,” said N’Longa, putting it in the Englishman’s hand. “Where your guns and long knife fail, this save you. When you want me,

lay this on your breast, fold your hands on it and sleep. I come to you in your dreams."

Kane weighed the thing in his hand, highly suspicious of witchcraft. It was not heavy, but seemed hard as iron. A good weapon at least, he decided. Dawn was just beginning to steal over the jungle and the river.

II

RED EYES

Solomon Kane shifted his musket from his shoulder and let the stock fall to the earth. Silence lay about him like a fog. Kane's lined face and tattered garments showed the effect of long bush travel. He looked about him.

Some distance behind him loomed the green, rank jungle, thinning out to low shrubs, stunted trees and tall grass. Some distance in front of him rose the first of a chain of bare, somber hills, littered with boulders, shimmering in the merciless heat of the sun. Between the hills and the jungle lay a broad expanse of rough, uneven grasslands, dotted here and there by clumps of thorn-trees.

An utter silence hung over the country. The only sign of life was a few vultures flapping heavily across the distant hills. For the last few days Kane had noticed the increasing number of these unsavory birds. The sun was rocking westward but its heat was in no way abated.

Trailing his musket he started forward slowly. He had no objective in view. This was all unknown country and one direction was as good as another. Many weeks ago he had plunged into the jungle with the assurance born of courage and ignorance. Having by some miracle survived the first few weeks, he was becoming hard and toughened, able to hold his own with any of the grim denizens of the fastness he dared.

As he progressed he noted an occasional lion spoor but there seemed to be no animals in the grasslands–none that left tracks, at any rate. Vultures sat like black, brooding images in some of the stunted trees, and suddenly he saw an activity among them some distance beyond. Several of the dusky

birds circled about a clump of high grass, dipping, then rising again. Some beast of prey was defending his kill against them, Kane decided, and wondered at the lack of snarling and roaring which usually accompanied such scenes. His curiosity was roused and he turned his steps in that direction.

At last, pushing through the grass which rose about his shoulders, he saw, as through a corridor walled with the rank waving blades, a ghastly sight. The corpse of a black man lay, face down, and as the Englishman looked, a great dark snake rose and slid away into the grass, moving so quickly that Kane was unable to decide its nature. But it had a weird human-like suggestion about it.

Kane stood over the body, noting that while the limbs lay awry as if broken, the flesh was not torn as a lion or leopard would have torn it. He glanced up at the whirling vultures and was amazed to see several of them skimming along close to the earth, following a waving of the grass which marked the flight of the thing which had presumably slain the black man. Kane wondered what thing the carrion birds, which eat only the dead, were hunting through the grasslands. But Africa is full of never-explained mysteries.

Kane shrugged his shoulders and lifted his musket again. Adventures he had had in plenty since he parted from N’Longa some moons agone, but still that nameless paranoid urge had driven him on and on, deeper and deeper into those trackless ways. Kane could not have analyzed this call; he would have attributed it to Satan, who lures men to their destruction. But it was but the restless turbulent spirit of the adventurer, the wanderer–the same urge which sends the gipsy caravans about the world, which drove the Viking galleys over unknown seas and which guides the flights of the wild geese.

Kane sighed. Here in this barren land seemed neither food nor water, but he had wearied unto death of the dank, rank venom of the thick jungle. Even a wilderness of bare hills was preferable, for a time at least. He glanced at them, where they lay brooding in the sun, and started forward again.

He held N’Longa’s fetish stave in his left hand, and though his conscience still troubled him for keeping a thing so apparently diabolic in nature, he had never been able to bring himself to throw it away.

Now as he went toward the hills, a sudden commotion broke out in the tall grass in front of him, which was, in places, taller than a man. A thin, high-pitched scream sounded and on its heels an earth-shaking roar. The grass parted and a slim figure came flying toward him like a wisp of straw blown on the wind–a brown-skinned girl, clad only in a skirt-like garment. Behind her, some yards away but gaining swiftly, came a huge lion.

The girl fell at Kane’s feet with a wail and a sob, and lay clutching at his ankles. The Englishman dropped the voodoo stave, raised his musket to his shoulder and sighted coolly at the ferocious feline face which neared him every instant. Crash! The girl screamed once and slumped on her face. The huge cat leaped high and wildly, to fall and lie motionless.

Kane reloaded hastily before he spared a glance at the form at his feet. The girl lay as still as the lion he had just slain, but a quick examination showed that she had only fainted.

He bathed her face with water from his canteen and presently she opened her eyes and sat up. Fear flooded her face as she looked at her rescuer and she made to rise.

Kane held out a restraining hand and she cowered down, trembling. The roar of his heavy musket was enough to frighten any native who had never before seen a white man, Kane reflected.

The girl was a much higher type than the thick-lipped, bestial West Coast negroes to whom Kane had been used. She was slim and finely formed, of a deep brown hue rather than ebony; her nose was straight and thin-bridged, her lips were not too thick. Somewhere in her blood there was a strong Berber strain.

Kane spoke to her in a river dialect, a simple language he had learned during his wandering, and she replied haltingly. The inland tribes traded slaves and ivory to the river people and were familiar with their jargon.

“My village is there,” she answered Kane’s question, pointing to the southern jungle with a slim, rounded arm. “My name is Zunna. My mother whipped me for breaking a cooking-kettle and I ran away because I was angry. I am afraid; let me go back to my mother!”

“You may go,” said Kane, “but I will take you, child. Suppose another lion came along? You were very foolish to run away.”

She whimpered a little. “Are you not a god?”

“No, Zunna. I am only a man, though the color of my skin is not as yours. Lead me now to your village.”

She rose hesitantly, eyeing him apprehensively through the wild tangle of her hair. To Kane she seemed like some frightened young animal. She led the way and Kane followed. She indicated that her village lay to the southeast, and their route brought them nearer to the hills. The sun began to sink and the roaring of lions reverberated over the grasslands. Kane glanced at the western sky; this open country was no place in which to be caught by night. He glanced toward the hills and saw that they were within a few hundred yards of the nearest. He saw what seemed to be a cave.

“Zunna,” said he haltingly, “we can never reach your village before nightfall and if we bide here the lions will take us. Yonder is a cavern where we may spend the night–”

She shrank and trembled.

“Not in the hills, master!” she whimpered. “Better the lions!”

“Nonsense!” His tone was impatient; he had had enough of native superstition. “We will spend the night in yonder cave.”

She argued no further, but followed him. They went up a short slope and stood at the mouth of the cavern, a small affair, with sides of solid rock and a floor of deep sand.

“Gather some dry grass, Zunna,” commanded Kane, standing his musket against the wall at the mouth of the cave, “but go not far away, and listen for lions. I will build here a fire which shall keep us safe from beasts tonight. Bring some grass and any twigs you may find, like a good child, and we will sup. I have dried meat in my pouch and water also.”

She gave him a strange, long glance, then turned away without a word. Kane tore up grass near at hand, noting how it was seared and crisp from the sun, and heaping it up, struck flint and steel. Flame leaped up and devoured the heap in an instant. He was wondering how he could gather enough grass to keep a fire going all night, when he was aware that he had visitors.

Kane was used to grotesque sights, but at first glance he started and a slight coldness traveled down his spine. Two black men stood before him in silence. They were tall and gaunt and entirely naked. Their skins were a dusty black, tinged with a gray, ashy hue, as of death. Their faces were different from any negroes he had seen. The brows were high and narrow, the noses huge and snout-like; the eyes were inhumanly large and inhumanly red. As the two stood there it seemed to Kane that only their burning eyes lived.

He spoke to them, but they did not answer. He invited them to eat with a motion of his hand, and they silently squatted down near the cave mouth, as far from the dying embers of the fire as they could get.

Kane turned to his pouch and began taking out the strips of dried meat which he carried. Once he glanced at his silent guests; it seemed to him that they were watching the glowing ashes of his fire, rather than him.

The sun was about to sink behind the western horizon. A red, fierce glow spread over the grasslands, so that all seemed like a waving sea of blood. Kane knelt over his pouch, and glancing up, saw Zunna come around the shoulder of the hill with her arms full of grass and dry branches.

As he looked, her eyes flared wide; the branches dropped from her arms and her scream knifed the silence, fraught with terrible warning. Kane whirled on his knee. Two great black forms loomed over him as he came up

with the lithe motion of a springing leopard. The fetish stave was in his hand and he drove it through the body of the nearest foe with a force which sent its sharp point between the negro's shoulders. Then the long, lean arms of the other locked about him, and white man and black man went down together.

The talon-like nails of the black were tearing at his face, the hideous red eyes staring into his with a terrible threat, as Kane writhed about and, fending off the clawing hands with one arm, drew a pistol. He pressed the muzzle close against the black's side and pulled the trigger. At the muffled report, the negro's body jerked to the concussion of the bullet, but the thick lips merely gaped in a horrid grin.

One long arm slid under Kane's shoulders, the other hand gripped his hair. The Englishman felt his head being forced back irresistibly. He clutched at the other's wrist with both hands, but the flesh under his frantic fingers was as hard as wood. Kane's brain was reeling; his neck seemed ready to break with a little more pressure. He threw his body backward with one volcanic effort, breaking the deathly hold.

The black was on him and the talons were clutching again. Kane found and raised the empty pistol, and he felt the black man's skull cave in like a shell as he brought down the long barrel with all his strength.

And once again the writhing lips parted in fearful mockery.

And now a near panic clutched Kane. What sort of man was this, who still menaced his life with tearing fingers, after having been shot and mortally bludgeoned? No man, surely, but one of the sons of Satan!

At the thought Kane wrenched and heaved explosively, and the close-locked combatants tumbled across the earth to come to a rest in the smoldering ashes before the cave mouth. Kane barely felt the heat, but the mouth of his foe gaped, this time in seeming agony. The frightful fingers loosened their hold and Kane sprang clear.

The black man with his shattered skull was rising on one hand and one knee when Kane struck, returning to the attack as a gaunt wolf returns to a

wounded bison. From the side he leaped, landing full on the black giant's back, his steely arms seeking and finding a deadly wrestling hold; and as they went to the earth together he broke the negro's neck, so that the hideous dead face looked back over one shoulder.

The black man lay still but to Kane it seemed that he was not dead even then, for the red eyes still burned with their grisly light.

The Englishman turned, to see the girl crouching against the cave wall. He looked for his stave; it lay in a heap of dust, among which were a few moldering bones. He stared, his brain reeling. Then with one stride he caught up the voodoo staff and turned to the fallen negro. His face set in grim lines as he raised it; then he drove it through the black breast. And before his eyes, the giant body crumbled, dissolving to dust as he watched horror-struck, even as had crumbled he through whom Kane had first thrust the stave.

III

OceanofPDF.com

DREAM MAGIC

“Great God!” whispered Kane; “these men were dead! Vampires! This is Satan’s handiwork manifested.”

Zunna crawled to his knees and clung there.

“These be walking dead men, master,” she whimpered. “I should have warned you.”

“Why did they not leap on my back when they first came?” asked he.

“They feared the fire. They were waiting for the embers to die entirely.”

“Whence came they?”

“From the hills. Hundreds of their kind swarm among the boulders and caverns of these hills, and they live on human life, for a man they will slay, devouring his ghost as it leaves his quivering body. Aye, they are suckers of souls!

“Master, among the greater of these hills there is a silent city of stone, and in the old times, in the days of my ancestors, these people lived there. They were human, but they were not as we, for they had ruled this land for ages and ages. The ancestors of my people made war on them and slew many, and their magicians made all the dead men as these were. At last all died.

“And for ages have they preyed on the tribes of the jungle, stalking down from the hills at midnight and at sunset to haunt the jungle-ways and slay and slay. Men and beasts flee them and only fire will destroy them.”

“Here is that which will destroy them,” said Kane grimly, raising the voodoo stave. “Black magic must fight black magic, and I know not what spell N’Longa put hereon, but–”

“You are a god,” said Zunna decidedly. “No man could overcome two of the walking dead men. Master, can you not lift this curse from my tribe? There is nowhere for us to flee and the monsters slay us at will, catching

wayfarers outside the village wall. Death is on this land and we die helpless!”

Deep in Kane stirred the spirit of the crusader, the fire of the zealot–the fanatic who devotes his life to battling the powers of darkness.

“Let us eat,” said he; “then we will build a great fire at the cave mouth. The fire which keeps away beasts shall also keep away fiends.”

Later Kane sat just inside the cave, chin rested on clenched fist, eyes gazing unseeingly into the fire.

Behind in the shadows, Zunna watched him, awed.

“God of Hosts,” Kane muttered, “grant me aid! My hand it is which must lift the ancient curse from this dark land. How am I to fight these dead fiends, who yield not to mortal weapons? Fire will destroy them–a broken neck renders them helpless–the voodoo stave thrust through them crumbles them to dust–but of what avail? How may I prevail against the hundreds who haunt these hills, and to whom human life-essence is Life? Have not–as Zunna says–warriors come against them in the past, only to find them fled to their high-walled city where no man can come against them?”

The night wore on. Zunna slept, her cheek pillowed on her round, girlish arm. The roaring of the lions shook the hills and still Kane sat and gazed broodingly into the fire. Outside, the night was alive with whispers and rustlings and stealthily soft footfalls. And at times Kane, glancing up from his meditations, seemed to catch the gleam of great red eyes beyond the flickering light of the fire.

Gray dawn was stealing over the grasslands when Kane shook Zunna into wakefulness.

“God have mercy on my soul for delving in barbaric magic,” said he, “but demonry must be fought with demonry, mayhap. Tend ye the fire and awake me if aught untoward occur.”

Kane lay down on his back on the sand floor and laid the voodoo staff on his breast, folding his hands upon it. He fell asleep instantly. And sleeping, he dreamed. To his slumbering self it seemed that he walked through a thick fog and in this fog he met N'Longa, true to life. N'Longa spoke, and the words were clear and vivid, impressing themselves on his consciousness so deeply as to span the gap between sleeping and waking.

"Send this girl to her village soon after sun-up when the lions have gone to their lairs," said N'Longa,

"and bid her bring her lover to you at this cave. There make him lie down as if to slumber, holding the voodoo stave."

The dream faded and Kane awoke suddenly, wondering. How strange and vivid had been the vision, and how strange to hear N'Longa talking in English, without the jargon! Kane shrugged his shoulders. He knew that N'Longa claimed to possess the power of sending his spirit through space, and he himself had seen the voodoo man animate a dead man's body. Still–

"Zunna," said Kane, giving the problem up, "I will go with you as far as the edge of the jungle and you must go on to your village and return here to this cave with your lover."

"Kran?" she asked naïvely.

"Whatever his name is. Eat and we will go."

Again the sun slanted toward the west. Kane sat in the cave, waiting. He had seen the girl safely to the place where the jungle thinned to the grasslands, and though his conscience stung him at the thought of the dangers which might confront her, he sent her on alone and returned to the cave. He sat now, wondering if he would not be damned to everlasting flames for tinkering with the magic of a black sorcerer, blood-brother or not.

Light footfalls sounded, and as Kane reached for his musket, Zunna entered, accompanied by a tall, splendidly proportioned youth whose brown skin showed that he was of the same race as the girl. His soft dreamy eyes

were fixed on Kane in a sort of awesome worship. Evidently the girl had not minimized the white god's glory in her telling.

He bade the youth lie down as he directed and placed the voodoo stave in his hands. Zunna crouched at one side, wide-eyed. Kane stepped back, half ashamed of this mummery and wondering what, if anything, would come of it. Then to his horror, the youth gave one gasp and stiffened!

Zunna screamed, bounding erect.

"You have killed Kran!" she shrieked, flying at the Englishman who stood struck speechless.

Then she halted suddenly, wavered, drew a hand languidly across her brow–she slid down to lie with her arms about the motionless body of her lover.

And this body moved suddenly, made aimless motions with hands and feet, then sat up, disengaging itself from the clinging arms of the still senseless girl.

Kran looked up at Kane and grinned, a sly, knowing grin which seemed out of place on his face somehow. Kane started. Those soft eyes had changed in expression and were now hard and glittering and snaky–N'Longa's eyes!

"*Ai ya*," said Kran in a grotesquely familiar voice. "Blood-brother, you got no greeting for N'Longa?"

Kane was silent. His flesh crawled in spite of himself. Kran rose and stretched his arms in an unfamiliar sort of way, as if his limbs were new to him. He slapped his breast approvingly.

"Me N'Longa!" said he in the old boastful manner. "Mighty ju-ju man! Blood-brother, not you know me, eh?"

"You are Satan," said Kane sincerely. "Are you Kran or are you N'Longa?"

"Me N'Longa," assured the other. "My body sleep in ju-ju hut on Coast many treks from here. I borrow Kran's body for while. My ghost travel ten days' march in one breath; twenty days' march in same time.

My ghost go out from my body and drive out Kran's."

"And Kran is dead?"

"No, he no dead. I send his ghost to shadowland for a while–send the girl's ghost too, to keep him company; bimeby come back."

"This is the work of the Devil," said Kane frankly, "but I have seen you do even fouler magic–shall I call you N'Longa or Kran?"

"Kran– *kah!* Me N'Longa–bodies like clothes! Me N'Longa, in here now!" He rapped his breast.

"Bimeby Kran live along here–then he be Kran and I be N'Longa, same like before. Kran no live along now; N'Longa live along this one fellow body. Blood-brother, I am N'Longa!"

Kane nodded. This was in truth a land of horror and enchantment; anything was possible, even that the thin voice of N'Longa should speak to him from the great chest of Kran, and the snaky eyes of N'Longa should blink at him from the handsome young face of Kran.

"This land I know long time," said N'Longa, getting down to business. "Mighty ju-ju, these dead people!

No, no need to waste one fellow time–I know–I talk to you in sleep. My blood-brother want to kill out these dead black fellows, eh?"

"'Tis a thing opposed to nature," said Kane somberly. "They are known in my land as vampires–I never expected to come upon a whole nation of them."

IV

THE SILENT CITY

"Now we find this stone city," said N'Longa.

“Yes? Why not send your ghost out to kill these vampires?” Kane asked idly.

“Ghost got to have one fellow body to work in,” N’Longa answered. “Sleep now. Tomorrow we start.”

The sun had set; the fire glowed and flickered in the cave mouth. Kane glanced at the still form of the girl, who lay where she had fallen, and prepared himself for slumber.

“Awake me at midnight,” he admonished, “and I will watch from then until dawn.”

But when N’Longa finally shook his arm, Kane awoke to see the first light of dawn reddening the land.

“Time we start,” said the fetish-man.

“But the girl–are you sure she lives?”

“She live, blood-brother.”

“Then in God’s name, we can not leave her here at the mercy of any prowling fiend who might chance upon her. Or some lion might–”

“No lion come. Vampire scent still linger, mixed with man scent. One fellow lion he no like man scent and he fear the walking dead men. No beast come; and”–lifting the voodoo stave and laying it across the cave entrance–“no dead man come now.”

Kane watched him somberly and without enthusiasm.

“How will that rod safeguard her?”

“That mighty ju-ju,” said N’Longa. “You see how one fellow vampire go along dust alongside that stave!

No vampire dare touch or come near it. I gave it to you, because outside Vampire Hills one fellow man sometimes meet a corpse walking in jungle

when shadows be black. Not all walking dead man be here.

And all must suck Life from men–if not, they rot like dead wood."

"Then make many of these rods and arm the people with them."

"No can do!" N'Longa's skull shook violently. "That ju-ju rod be mighty magic! Old, old! No man live today can tell how old that fellow ju-ju stave be. I make my blood-brother sleep and do magic with it to guard him, that time we make palaver in Coast village. Today we scout and run; no need it. Leave it here to guard girl."

Kane shrugged his shoulders and followed the fetish-man, after glancing back at the still shape which lay in the cave. He would never have agreed to leave her so casually, had he not believed in his heart that she was dead. He had touched her, and her flesh was cold.

They went up among the barren hills as the sun was rising. Higher they climbed, up steep clay slopes, winding their way through ravines and between great boulders. The hills were honeycombed with dark, forbidding caves, and these they passed warily, and Kane's flesh crawled as he thought of the grisly occupants therein. For N'Longa said:

"Them vampires, he sleep in caves most all day till sunset. Them caves, he be full of one fellow dead man."

The sun rose higher, baking down on the bare slopes with an intolerable heat. Silence brooded like an evil monster over the land. They had seen nothing, but Kane could have sworn at times that a black shadow drifted behind a boulder at their approach.

"Them vampires, they stay hid in daytime," said N'Longa with a low laugh. "They be afraid of one fellow vulture! No fool vulture! He know death when he see it! He pounce on one fellow dead man and tear and eat if he be lying or walking!"

A strong shudder shook his companion.

“Great God!” Kane cried, striking his thigh with his hat; “is there no end to the horror of this hideous land? Truly this land is dedicated to the powers of darkness!”

Kane’s eyes burned with a dangerous light. The terrible heat, the solitude and the knowledge of the horrors lurking on either hand were shaking even his steely nerves.

“Keep on one fellow hat, blood-brother,” admonished N’Longa with a low gurgle of amusement. “That fellow sun, he knock you dead, suppose you no look out.”

Kane shifted the musket he had insisted on bringing and made no reply. They mounted an eminence at last and looked down on a sort of plateau. And in the center of this plateau was a silent city of gray and crumbling stone. Kane was smitten by a sense of incredible age as he looked. The walls and houses were of great stone blocks, yet they were falling into ruin. Grass grew on the plateau, and high in the streets of that dead city. Kane saw no movement among the ruins.

“That is their city–why do they choose to sleep in caves?”

“Maybe-so one fellow stone fall on them from roof and crush. Them stone huts, he fall down bimeby.

Maybe-so they no like to stay together–maybe-so they eat each other, too.”

“Silence!” whispered Kane; “how it hangs over all!”

“Them vampires no talk nor yell; they dead. They sleep in caves, wander at sunset and at night.

Maybe-so them black fellow bush tribes come with spears, them vampires go to stone kraal and fight behind walls.”

Kane nodded. The crumbling walls which surrounded that dead city were still high and solid enough to resist the attack of spearmen–especially when defended by these snout-nosed fiends.

“Blood-brother,” said N’Longa solemnly, “I have mighty magic thought! Be silent a little while.”

Kane seated himself on a boulder and gazed broodingly at the bare crags and slopes which surrounded them. Far away to the south he saw the leafy green ocean that was the jungle. Distance lent a certain enchantment to the scene. Closer at hand loomed the dark blotches that were the mouths of the caves of horror.

N’Longa was squatting, tracing some strange pattern in the clay with a dagger point. Kane watched him, thinking how easily they might fall victim to the vampires if even three or four of the fiends should come out of their caverns. And even as he thought it, a black and horrific shadow fell across the crouching fetish-man.

Kane acted without conscious thought. He shot from the boulder where he sat like a stone hurled from a catapult, and his musket stock shattered the face of the hideous black thing who had stolen upon them.

Back and back Kane drove his inhuman foe staggering, never giving him time to halt or launch an offensive, battering him with the onslaught of a frenzied tiger.

At the very edge of the cliff the vampire wavered, then pitched back over, to fall for a hundred feet and lie writhing on the rocks of the plateau below. N’Longa was on his feet pointing; the hills were giving up their dead.

Out of the caves they were swarming, the terrible black silent shapes; up the slopes they came charging and over the boulders they came clambering, and their red eyes all turned toward the two humans who stood above the silent city. The caves belched them forth in an unholy judgment day.

N’Longa pointed to a crag some distance away and with a shout started running fleetly toward it. Kane followed. From behind boulders black-taloned hands clawed at them, tearing their garments. They raced past caves, and mummied monsters came lurching out of the dark, gibbering silently, to join in the pursuit.

The dead hands were close at their back when they scrambled up the last slope and stood on a ledge which was the top of the crag. The fiends halted silently a moment, then came clambering after them.

Kane clubbed his musket and smashed down into the red-eyed faces, knocking aside the upleaping hands. They surged up like a black wave; he swung his musket in a silent fury that matched theirs. The black wave broke and wavered back; came on again.

He–could–not–kill–them! These words beat on his brain like a sledge on an anvil as he shattered wood-like flesh and dead bone with his smashing swings. He knocked them down, hurled them back, but they rose and came on again. This could not last–what in God's name was N'Longa doing? Kane spared one swift, tortured glance over his shoulder. The fetish-man stood on the highest part of the ledge, head thrown back, arms lifted as if in invocation.

Kane's vision blurred to the sweep of hideous black faces with red, staring eyes. Those in front were horrible to see now, for their skulls were shattered, their faces caved in and their limbs broken. But still they came on and those behind reached across their shoulders to clutch at the man who defied them.

Kane was red but the blood was all his. From the long-withered veins of those monsters no single drop of warm red blood trickled. Suddenly from behind him came a long piercing wail–N'Longa! Over the crash of the flying musket-stock and the shattering of bones it sounded high and clear–the only voice lifted in that hideous fight.

The black wave washed about Kane's feet, dragging him down. Keen talons tore at him, flaccid lips sucked at his wounds. He reeled up again, disheveled and bloody, clearing a space with a shattering sweep of his splintered musket. Then they closed in again and he went down.

"This is the end!" he thought, but even at that instant the press slackened and the sky was suddenly filled with the beat of great wings.

Then he was free and staggered up, blindly and dizzily, ready to renew the strife. He halted, frozen.

Down the slope the black horde was fleeing and over their heads and close at their shoulders flew huge vultures, tearing and rending avidly, sinking their beaks in the dead black flesh, devouring the vampires as they fled.

Kane laughed, almost insanely.

“Defy man and God, but you may not deceive the vultures, sons of Satan! They know whether a man be alive or dead!”

N’Longa stood like a prophet on the pinnacle and the great black birds soared and wheeled about him.

His arms still waved and his voice still wailed out across the hills. And over the skylines they came, hordes on endless hordes–vultures, vultures, vultures! come to the feast so long denied them. They blackened the sky with their numbers, blotted out the sun; a strange darkness fell on the land. They settled in long dusky lines, diving into the caverns with a whir of wings and a clash of beaks. Their talons tore at the black horrors which these caves disgorged.

Now all the vampires were fleeing to their city. The vengeance held back for ages had come down on them and their last hope was the heavy walls which had kept back the desperate human foes. Under those crumbling roofs they might find shelter. And N’Longa watched them stream into the city, and he laughed until the crags re-echoed.

Now all were in and the birds settled like a cloud over the doomed city, perching in solid rows along the walls, sharpening their beaks and claws on the towers.

And N’Longa struck flint and steel to a bundle of dry leaves he had brought with him. The bundle leaped into instant flame and he straightened and flung the blazing thing far out over the cliffs. It fell like a meteor to the plateau beneath, showering sparks. The tall grass of the plateau leaped aflame.

From the silent city beneath them Fear flowed in unseen waves, like a white fog. Kane smiled grimly.

“The grass is sere and brittle from the drouth,” he said; “there has been even less rain than usual this season; it will burn swiftly.”

Like a crimson serpent the fire ran through the high dead grass. It spread and it spread and Kane, standing high above, yet felt the fearful intensity of the hundreds of red eyes which watched from the stone city.

Now the scarlet snake had reached the walls and was rearing as if to coil and writhe over them. The vultures rose on heavily flapping wings and soared reluctantly. A vagrant gust of wind whipped the blaze about and drove it in a long red sheet around the wall. Now the city was hemmed in on all sides by a solid barricade of flame. The roar came up to the two men on the high crag.

Sparks flew across the wall, lighting in the high grass in the streets. A score of flames leaped up and grew with terrifying speed. A veil of red cloaked streets and buildings, and through this crimson, whirling mist Kane and N’Longa saw hundreds of black shapes scamper and writhe, to vanish suddenly in red bursts of flame. There rose an intolerable scent of decaying flesh burning.

Kane gazed, awed. This was truly a hell on earth. As in a nightmare he looked into the roaring red cauldron where black insects fought against their doom and perished. The flames leaped a hundred feet in air, and suddenly above their roar sounded one bestial, inhuman scream like a shriek from across nameless gulfs of cosmic space, as one vampire, dying, broke the chains of silence which had held him for untold centuries. High and haunting it rose, the death cry of a vanishing race.

Then the flames dropped suddenly. The conflagration had been a typical grass fire, short and fierce. Now the plateau showed a blackened expanse and the city a charred and smoking mass of crumbling stone.

Not one corpse lay in view, not even a charred bone. Above all whirled the dark swarms of the vultures, but they, too, were beginning to scatter.

Kane gazed hungrily at the clean blue sky. Like a strong sea wind clearing a fog of horror was the sight to him. From somewhere sounded the faint and far-off roaring of a distant lion. The vultures were flapping away in black, straggling lines.

V

PALAVER SET!

Kane sat in the mouth of the cave where Zunna lay, submitting to the fetish-man's bandaging.

The Puritan's garments hung in tatters about his frame; his limbs and breast were deeply gashed and darkly bruised, but he had had no mortal wound in that deathly fight on the cliff.

"Mighty men, we be!" declared N'Longa with deep approval. "Vampire city be silent now, sure 'nough!

No walking dead man live along these hills."

"I do not understand," said Kane, resting chin on hand. "Tell me, N'Longa, how have you done things?

How talked you with me in my dreams; how came you into the body of Kran; and how summoned you the vultures?"

"My blood-brother," said N'Longa, discarding his pride in his pidgin English, to drop into the river language understood by Kane, "I am so old that you would call me a liar if I told you my age. All my life I have worked magic, sitting first at the feet of mighty ju-ju men of the south and the east; then I was a slave to the Buckra–the white man–and learned more. My brother, shall I span all these years in a moment and make you understand with a word, what has taken me so long to learn? I could not even make you understand how these vampires have kept their bodies from decay by drinking the lives of men.

“I sleep and my spirit goes out over the jungle and the rivers to talk with the sleeping spirits of my friends.

There is a mighty magic on the voodoo staff I gave you–a magic out of the Old Land which draws my ghost to it as a white man’s magnet draws metal.”

Kane listened unspeaking, seeing for the first time in N’Longa’s glittering eyes something stronger and deeper than the avid gleam of the worker in black magic. To Kane it seemed almost as if he looked into the far-seeing and mystic eyes of a prophet of old.

“I spoke to you in dreams,” N’Longa went on, “and I made a deep sleep come over the souls of Kran and of Zunna, and removed them to a far dim land, whence they shall soon return, unremembering. All things bow to magic, blood-brother, and beasts and birds obey the master words. I worked strong voodoo, vulture-magic, and the flying people of the air gathered at my call.

“These things I know and am a part of, but how shall I tell you of them? Blood-brother, you are a mighty warrior, but in the ways of magic you are as a little child lost. And what has taken me long dark years to know, I may not divulge to you so you would understand. My friend, you think only of bad spirits, but were my magic always bad, should I not take this fine young body in place of my old wrinkled one and keep it? But Kran shall have his body back safely.

“Keep the voodoo staff, blood-brother. It has mighty power against all sorcerers and serpents and evil things. Now I return to the village on the Coast where my true body sleeps. And what of you, my blood-brother?”

Kane pointed silently eastward.

“The call grows no weaker. I go.”

N’Longa nodded, held out his hand. Kane grasped it. The mystical expression had gone from the dusky face and the eyes twinkled snakily with a sort of reptilian mirth.

“Me go now, blood-brother,” said the fetish-man, returning to his beloved jargon, of which knowledge he was prouder than all his conjuring tricks. “You take care–that one fellow jungle, she pluck your bones yet! Remember that voodoo stave, brother. Ai ya, palaver set!”

He fell back on the sand, and Kane saw the keen sly expression of N’Longa fading from the face of Kran. His flesh crawled again. Somewhere back on the Slave Coast, the body of N’Longa, withered and wrinkled, was stirring in the ju-ju hut, was rising as if from a deep sleep. Kane shuddered.

Kran sat up, yawned, stretched and smiled. Beside him the girl Zunna rose, rubbing her eyes.

“Master,” said Kran apologetically, “we must have slumbered.”

Dig Me No Grave

The thunder of my old-fashioned door-knocker, reverberating eerily through the house, roused me from a restless and nightmare-haunted sleep. I looked out the window. In the last light of the sinking moon, the white face of my friend John Conrad looked up at me.

“May I come up, Kirowan?” His voice was shaky and strained.

“Certainly!” I sprang out of bed and pulled on a bath-robe as I heard him enter the front door and ascend the stairs.

A moment later he stood before me, and in the light which I had turned on I saw his hands tremble and noticed the unnatural pallor of his face.

“Old John Grimlan died an hour ago,” he said abruptly.

“Indeed? I had not known that he was ill.”

“It was a sudden, virulent attack of peculiar nature, a sort of seizure somewhat akin to epilepsy. He has been subject to such spells of late years, you know.”

I nodded. I knew something of the old hermit-like man who had lived in his great dark house on the hill; indeed, I had once witnessed one of his strange seizures, and I had been appalled at the writhings, howlings and yammerings of the wretch, who had groveled on the earth like a wounded snake, gibbering terrible curses and black blasphemies until his voice broke in a wordless screaming which spattered his lips with foam. Seeing this, I understood why people in old times looked on such victims as men possessed by demons.

"–some hereditary taint," Conrad was saying. "Old John doubtless fell heir to some ingrown weakness brought on by some loathsome disease, which was his heritage from perhaps a remote ancestor–such things occasionally happen. Or else–well, you know old John himself pried about in the mysterious parts of the earth, and wandered all over the East in his younger days. It is quite possible that he was infected with some obscure malady in his wanderings. There are still many unclassified diseases in Africa and the Orient."

"But," said I, "you have not told me the reason for this sudden visit at this unearthly hour–for I notice that it is past midnight."

My friend seemed rather confused.

"Well, the fact is that John Grimlan died alone, except for myself. He refused to receive any medical aid of any sort, and in the last few moments when it was evident that he was dying, and I was prepared to go for some sort of help in spite of him, he set up such a howling and screaming that I could not refuse his passionate pleas–which were that he should not be left to die alone.

"I have seen men die," added Conrad, wiping the perspiration from his pale brow, "but the death of John Grimlan was the most fearful I have ever seen."

"He suffered a great deal?"

"He appeared to be in much physical agony, but this was mostly submerged by some monstrous mental or psychic suffering. The fear in his distended

eyes and his screams transcended any conceivable earthly terror. I tell you, Kirowan, Grimlan's fright was greater and deeper than the ordinary fear of the Beyond shown by a man of ordinarily evil life."

I shifted restlessly. The dark implications of this statement sent a chill of nameless apprehension trickling down my spine.

"I know the country people always claimed that in his youth he sold his soul to the Devil, and that his sudden epileptic attacks were merely a visible sign of the Fiend's power over him; but such talk is foolish, of course, and belongs in the Dark Ages. We all know that John Grimlan's life was a peculiarly evil and vicious one, even toward his last days. With good reason he was universally detested and feared, for I never heard of his doing a single good act. You were his only friend."

"And that was a strange friendship," said Conrad. "I was attracted to him by his unusual powers, for despite his bestial nature, John Grimlan was a highly educated man, a deeply cultured man. He had dipped deep into occult studies, and I first met him in this manner; for as you know, I have always been strongly interested in these lines of research myself.

"But, in this as in all other things, Grimlan was evil and perverse. He had ignored the white side of the occult and delved into the darker, grimmer phases of it–into devil-worship, and voodoo and Shintoism.

His knowledge of these foul arts and sciences was immense and unholy. And to hear him tell of his researches and experiments was to know such horror and repulsion as a venomous reptile might inspire.

For there had been no depths to which he had not sunk, and some things he only hinted at, even to me. I tell you, Kirowan, it is easy to laugh at tales of the black world of the unknown, when one is in pleasant company under the bright sunlight, but had you sat at ungodly hours in the silent bizarre library of John Grimlan and looked on the ancient musty volumes and listened to his grisly talk as I did, your tongue would have cloven to your palate with sheer horror as mine did, and the supernatural would have seemed very real and near to you–as it seemed to me!"

“But in God’s name, man!” I cried, for the tension was growing unbearable; “come to the point and tell me what you want of me.”

“I want you to come with me to John Grimlan’s house and help carry out his outlandish instructions in regard to his body.”

I had no liking for the adventure, but I dressed hurriedly, an occasional shudder of premonition shaking me. Once fully clad, I followed Conrad out of the house and up the silent road which led to the house of John Grimlan. The road wound uphill, and all the way, looking upward and forward, I could see that great grim house perched like a bird of evil on the crest of the hill, bulking black and stark against the stars. In the west pulsed a single dull red smear where the young moon had just sunk from view behind the low black hills. The whole night seemed full of brooding evil, and the persistent swishing of a bat’s wings somewhere overhead caused my taut nerves to jerk and thrum. To drown the quick pounding of my own heart, I said:

“Do you share the belief so many hold, that John Grimlan was mad?”

We strode on several paces before Conrad answered, seemingly with a strange reluctance, “But for one incident, I would say no man was ever saner. But one night in his study, he seemed suddenly to break all bonds of reason.

“He had discoursed for hours on his favorite subject–black magic–when suddenly he cried, as his face lit with a weird unholy glow: ‘Why should I sit here babbling such child’s prattle to you? These voodoo rituals–these Shinto sacrifices–feathered snakes–goats without horns–black leopard cults–bah! Filth and dust that the wind blows away! Dregs of the real Unknown–the deep mysteries! Mere echoes from the Abyss!

“‘I could tell you things that would shatter your paltry brain! I could breathe into your ear names that would wither you like a burnt weed! What do you know of Yog-Sothoth, of Kathulos and the sunken cities? None of these names is even included in your mythologies. Not even in your dreams have you glimpsed the black cyclopean walls of Koth, or shriveled before the noxious winds that blow from Yuggoth!

“‘But I will not blast you lifeless with my black wisdom! I cannot expect your infantile brain to bear what mine holds. Were you as old as I–had you seen, as I have seen, kingdoms crumble and generations pass away–had you gathered as ripe grain the dark secrets of the centuries–’

“He was raving away, his wildly lit face scarcely human in appearance, and suddenly, noting my evident bewilderment, he burst into a horrible cackling laugh.

“‘Gad!’ he cried in a voice and accent strange to me, ‘methinks I’ve frighted ye, and certes, it is not to be marveled at, sith ye be but a naked salvage in the arts of life, after all. Ye think I be old, eh? Why, ye gaping lout, ye’d drop dead were I to divulge the generations of men I’ve known–’

“But at this point such horror overcame me that I fled from him as from an adder, and his high-pitched, diabolical laughter followed me out of the shadowy house. Some days later I received a letter apologizing for his manner and ascribing it candidly–too candidly–to drugs. I did not believe it, but I renewed our relations, after some hesitation.”

“It sounds like utter madness,” I muttered.

“Yes,” admitted Conrad, hesitantly. “But–Kirowan, have you ever seen anyone who knew John Grimlan in his youth?”

I shook my head.

“I have been at pains to inquire about him discreetly,” said Conrad. “He has lived here–with the exception of mysterious absences often for months at a time–for twenty years. The older villagers remember distinctly when he first came and took over that old house on the hill, and they all say that in the intervening years he seems not to have aged perceptibly. When he came here he looked just as he does now–or did, up to the moment of his death–of the appearance of a man about fifty.

“I met old Von Boehnk in Vienna, who said he knew Grimlan when a very young man studying in Berlin, fifty years ago, and he expressed

astonishment that the old man was still living; for he said at that time Grimlan seemed to be about fifty years of age."

I gave an incredulous exclamation, seeing the implication toward which the conversation was trending.

"Nonsense! Professor Von Boehnk is past eighty himself, and liable to the errors of extreme age. He confused this man with another." Yet as I spoke, my flesh crawled unpleasantly and the hairs on my neck prickled.

"Well," shrugged Conrad, "here we are at the house."

The huge pile reared up menacingly before us, and as we reached the front door a vagrant wind moaned through the near-by trees and I started foolishly as I again heard the ghostly beat of the bat's wings.

Conrad turned a large key in the antique lock, and as we entered, a cold draft swept across us like a breath from the grave–moldy and cold. I shuddered.

We groped our way through a black hallway and into a study, and here Conrad lighted a candle, for no gas lights or electric lights were to be found in the house. I looked about me, dreading what the light might disclose, but the room, heavily tapestried and bizarrely furnished, was empty save for us two.

"Where–where is– *It*?" I asked in a husky whisper, from a throat gone dry.

"Upstairs," answered Conrad in a low voice, showing that the silence and mystery of the house had laid a spell on him also. "Upstairs, in the library where he died."

I glanced up involuntarily. Somewhere above our head, the lone master of this grim house was stretched out in his last sleep–silent, his white face set in a grinning mask of death. Panic swept over me and I fought for control. After all, it was merely the corpse of a wicked old man, who was past harming anyone–this argument rang hollowly in my brain like the words of a frightened child who is trying to reassure himself.

I turned to Conrad. He had taken a time-yellowed envelope from an inside pocket.

“This,” he said, removing from the envelope several pages of closely written, time-yellowed parchment,

“is, in effect, the last word of John Grimlan, though God alone knows how many years ago it was written.

He gave it to me ten years ago, immediately after his return from Mongolia. It was shortly after this that he had his first seizure.

“This envelope he gave me, sealed, and he made me swear that I would hide it carefully, and that I would not open it until he was dead, when I was to read the contents and follow their directions exactly. More, he made me swear that no matter what he said or did after giving me the envelope, I would go ahead as first directed. ‘For,’ he said with a fearful smile, ‘the flesh is weak but I am a man of my word, and though I might, in a moment of weakness, wish to retract, it is far, far too late now. You may never understand the matter, but you are to do as I have said.’”

“Well?”

“Well,” again Conrad wiped his brow, “tonight as he lay writhing in his death-agonies, his wordless howls were mingled with frantic admonitions to me to bring him the envelope and destroy it before his eyes! As he yammered this, he forced himself up on his elbows and with eyes staring and hair standing straight up on his head, he screamed at me in a manner to chill the blood. And he was shrieking for me to destroy the envelope, not to open it; and once he howled in his delirium for me to hew his body into pieces and scatter the bits to the four winds of heaven!”

An uncontrollable exclamation of horror escaped my dry lips.

“At last,” went on Conrad, “I gave in. Remembering his commands ten years ago, I at first stood firm, but at last, as his screeches grew unbearably desperate, I turned to go for the envelope, even though that meant leaving him alone. But as I turned, with one last fearful convulsion in which blood-

flecked foam flew from his writhing lips, the life went from his twisted body in a single great wrench."

He fumbled at the parchment.

"I am going to carry out my promise. The directions herein seem fantastic and may be the whims of a disordered mind, but I gave my word. They are, briefly, that I place his corpse on the great black ebony table in his library, with seven black candles burning about him. The doors and windows are to be firmly closed and fastened. Then, in the darkness which precedes dawn, I am to read the formula, charm or spell which is contained in a smaller, sealed envelope inside the first, and which I have not yet opened."

"But is that all?" I cried. "No provisions as to the disposition of his fortune, his estate–or his corpse?"

"Nothing. In his will, which I have seen elsewhere, he leaves estate and fortune to a certain Oriental gentleman named in the document as–Malik Tous!"

"What!" I cried, shaken to my soul. "Conrad, this is madness heaped on madness! Malik Tous–good God! No mortal man was ever so named! That is the title of the foul god worshipped by the mysterious Yezidees–they of Mount Alamout the Accursed–whose Eight Brazen Towers rise in the mysterious wastes of deep Asia. His idolatrous symbol is the brazen peacock. And the Muhammadans, who hate his demon-worshipping devotees, say he is the essence of the evil of all the universes–the Prince of Darkness–Ahriman–the old Serpent–the veritable Satan! And you say Grimlan names this mythical demon in his will?"

"It is the truth," Conrad's throat was dry. "And look–he has scribbled a strange line at the corner of this parchment: 'Dig me no grave; I shall not need one.'"

Again a chill wandered down my spine.

"In God's name," I cried in a kind of frenzy, "let us get this incredible business over with!"

“I think a drink might help,” answered Conrad, moistening his lips. “It seems to me I’ve seen Grimlan go into this cabinet for wine–” He bent to the door of an ornately carved mahogany cabinet, and after some difficulty opened it.

“No wine here,” he said disappointedly, “and if ever I felt the need of stimulants–what’s this?”

He drew out a roll of parchment, dusty, yellowed and half covered with spiderwebs. Everything in that grim house seemed, to my nervously excited senses, fraught with mysterious meaning and import, and I leaned over his shoulder as he unrolled it.

“It’s a record of peerage,” he said, “such a chronicle of births, deaths and so forth, as the old families used to keep, in the Sixteenth Century and earlier.”

“What’s the name?” I asked.

He scowled over the dim scrawls, striving to master the faded, archaic script.

“G-r-y-m–I’ve got it–Grymlann, of course. It’s the records of old John’s family–the Grymlanns of Toad’s-heath Manor, Suffolk–what an outlandish name for an estate! Look at the last entry.”

Together we read, “John Grymlann, borne, March 10, 1630.” And then we both cried out. Under this entry was freshly written, in a strange scrawling hand, “Died, March 10, 1930.” Below this there was a seal of black wax, stamped with a strange design, something like a peacock with a spreading tail.

Conrad stared at me speechless, all the color ebbed from his face. I shook myself with the rage engendered by fear.

“It’s the hoax of a madman!” I shouted. “The stage has been set with such great care that the actors have overstepped themselves. Whoever they are, they have heaped up so many incredible effects as to nullify them. It’s all a very stupid, very dull drama of illusion.”

And even as I spoke, icy sweat stood out on my body and I shook as with an ague. With a wordless motion Conrad turned toward the stairs, taking up a large candle from a mahogany table.

“It was understood, I suppose,” he whispered, “that I should go through with this ghastly matter alone; but I had not the moral courage, and now I’m glad I had not.”

A still horror brooded over the silent house as we went up the stairs. A faint breeze stole in from somewhere and set the heavy velvet hangings rustling, and I visualized stealthy taloned fingers drawing aside the tapestries, to fix red gloating eyes upon us. Once I thought I heard the indistinct clumping of monstrous feet somewhere above us, but it must have been the heavy pounding of my own heart.

The stairs debouched into a wide dark corridor, in which our feeble candle cast a faint gleam which but illuminated our pale faces and made the shadows seem darker by comparison. We stopped at a heavy door, and I heard Conrad’s breath draw in sharply as a man’s will when he braces himself physically or mentally. I involuntarily clenched my fists until the nails bit into the palms; then Conrad thrust the door open.

A sharp cry escaped his lips. The candle dropped from his nerveless fingers and went out. The library of John Grimlan was ablaze with light, though the whole house had been in darkness when we entered it.

This light came from seven black candles placed at regular intervals about the great ebony table. On this table, between the candles–I had braced myself against the sight. Now in the face of the mysterious illumination and the sight of the thing on the table, my resolution nearly gave way. John Grimlan had been unlovely in life; in death he was hideous. Yes, he was hideous even though his face was mercifully covered with the same curious silken robe, which, worked in fantastic bird-like designs, covered his whole body except the crooked claw-like hands and the bare withered feet.

A strangling sound came from Conrad. “My God!” he whispered; “what is this? I laid his body out on the table and placed the candles about it, but I did not light them, nor did I place that robe over the body!

And there were bedroom slippers on his feet when I left–”

He halted suddenly. We were not alone in the death-room.

At first we had not seen him, as he sat in the great armchair in a farther nook of a corner, so still that he seemed a part of the shadows cast by the heavy tapestries. As my eyes fell upon him, a violent shuddering shook me and a feeling akin to nausea racked the pit of my stomach. My first impression was of vivid, oblique yellow eyes which gazed unwinkingly at us. Then the man rose and made a deep salaam, and we saw that he was an Oriental. Now when I strive to etch him clearly in my mind, I can resurrect no plain image of him. I only remember those piercing eyes and the yellow, fantastic robe he wore.

We returned his salute mechanically and he spoke in a low, refined voice, “Gentlemen, I crave your pardon! I have made so free as to light the candles–shall we not proceed with the business pertaining to our mutual friend.”

He made a slight gesture toward the silent bulk on the table. Conrad nodded, evidently unable to speak.

The thought flashed through our minds at the same time, that this man had also been given a sealed envelope–but how had he come to the Grimlan house so quickly? John Grimlan had been dead scarcely two hours and to the best of our knowledge no one knew of his demise but ourselves. And how had he got into the locked and bolted house?

The whole affair was grotesque and unreal in the extreme. We did not even introduce ourselves or ask the stranger his name. He took charge in a matter-of-fact way, and so under the spell of horror and illusion were we that we moved dazedly, involuntarily obeying his suggestions, given us in a low, respectful tone.

I found myself standing on the left side of the table, looking across its grisly burden at Conrad. The Oriental stood with arms folded and head bowed at the head of the table, nor did it then strike me as being strange that he should stand there, instead of Conrad who was to read what Grimlan had

written. I found my gaze drawn to the figure worked on the breast of the stranger's robe, in black silk–a curious figure, somewhat resembling a peacock and somewhat resembling a bat, or a flying dragon. I noted with a start that the same design was worked on the robe covering the corpse.

The doors had been locked, the windows fastened down. Conrad, with a shaky hand, opened the inner envelope and fluttered open the parchment sheets contained therein. These sheets seemed much older than those containing the instructions to Conrad, in the larger envelope. Conrad began to read in a monotonous drone which had the effect of hypnosis on the hearer; so at times the candles grew dim in my gaze and the room and its occupants swam strange and monstrous, veiled and distorted like an hallucination. Most of what he read was gibberish; it meant nothing; yet the sound of it and the archaic style of it filled me with an intolerable horror.

"To ye contract elsewhere recorded, I, John Grymlann, herebye sweare by ye Name of ye Nameless One to keep goode faithe. Wherefore do I now write in blood these wordes spoken to me in thys grim & silent chamber in ye dedde citie of Koth, whereto no mortal manne hath attained but mee. These same wordes now writ down by mee to be rede over my bodie at ye appointed tyme to fulfill my parte of ye bargain which I entered intoe of mine own free will & knowledge beinge of rite mynd & fiftie years of age this yeare of 1680, A. D. Here begynneth ye incantation:

"Before manne was, ye Elder ones were, & even yet their lord dwelleth amonge ye shadows to which if a manne sette his foote he maye not turn vpon his track."

The words merged into a barbaric gibberish as Conrad stumbled through an unfamiliar language–a language faintly suggesting the Phoenician, but shuddery with the touch of a hideous antiquity beyond any remembered earthly tongue. One of the candles flickered and went out. I made a move to relight it, but a motion from the silent Oriental stayed me. His eyes burned into mine, then shifted back to the still form on the table.

The manuscript had shifted back into its archaic English.

“–And ye mortal which gaineth to ye black citadels of Koth & speaks with ye Darke Lord whose face is hidden, for a price maye he gain hys heartes desire, ryches & knowledge beyond countinge & lyffe beyond mortal span even two hundred and fiftie yeares.”

Again Conrad’s voice trailed off into unfamiliar gutturals. Another candle went out.

“–Let not ye mortal flynche as ye tyme draweth nigh for payement & ye fires of Hell laye hold vpon ye vytals as the sign of reckoninge. For ye Prince of Darkness taketh hys due in ye endde & he is not to bee cozened. What ye have promised, that shall ye deliver. *Augantha ne shuba–*”

At the first sound of those barbaric accents, a cold hand of terror locked about my throat. My frantic eyes shot to the candles and I was not surprized to see another flicker out. Yet there was no hint of any draft to stir the heavy black hangings. Conrad’s voice wavered; he drew his hand across his throat, gagging momentarily. The eyes of the Oriental never altered.

“–Amonge ye sonnes of men glide strange shadows for ever. Men see ye tracks of ye talones but not ye feete that make them. Over ye souls of men spread great black wingges. There is but one Black Master though men calle hym Sathanas & Beelzebub & Apolleon & Ahriman & Malik Tous–”

Mists of horror engulfed me. I was dimly aware of Conrad’s voice droning on and on, both in English and in that other fearsome tongue whose horrific import I scarcely dared try to guess. And with stark fear clutching at my heart, I saw the candles go out, one by one. And with each flicker, as the gathering gloom darkened about us, my horror mounted. I could not speak, I could not move; my distended eyes were fixed with agonized intensity on the remaining candle. The silent Oriental at the head of that ghastly table was included in my fear. He had not moved nor spoken, but under his drooping lids, his eyes burned with devilish triumph; I knew that beneath his inscrutable exterior he was gloating fiendishly–but why– *why?*

But I *knew* that the moment the extinguishing of the last candle plunged the room into utter darkness, some nameless, abominable thing would take

place. Conrad was approaching the end. His voice rose to the climax in gathering crescendo.

“Approacheth now ye moment of payement. Ye ravens are flying. Ye bats winge against ye skye. There are skulls in ye starres. Ye soul & ye bodie are promised and shall bee delivered uppe. Not to ye dust agayne nor ye elements from which springe lyfe–”

The candle flickered slightly. I tried to scream, but my mouth gaped to a soundless yammering. I tried to flee, but I stood frozen, unable even to close my eyes.

“–Ye abysse yawns & ye debt is to paye. Ye light fayles, ye shadows gather. There is no god but evil; no lite but darkness; no hope but doom–”

A hollow groan resounded through the room. *It seemed to come from the robe-covered thing on the table!* That robe twitched fitfully.

“Oh winges in ye black darke!”

I started violently; a faint swish sounded in the gathering shadows. The stir of the dark hangings? It sounded like the rustle of gigantic wings.

“Oh redde eyes in ye shadows! What is promised, what is writ in bloode is fulfilled! Ye lite is gulfed in blackness! Ya–Koth!”

The last candle went out suddenly and a ghastly unhuman cry that came not from my lips or from Conrad’s burst unbearably forth. Horror swept over me like a black icy wave; in the blind dark I heard myself screaming terribly. Then with a swirl and a great rush of wind something swept the room, flinging the hangings aloft and dashing chairs and tables crashing to the floor. For an instant an intolerable odor burned our nostrils, a low hideous tittering mocked us in the blackness; then silence fell like a shroud.

Somehow, Conrad found a candle and lighted it. The faint glow showed us the room in fearful disarray–showed us each other’s ghastly faces–and showed us the black ebony table–empty! The doors and windows were

locked as they had been, but the Oriental was gone–and so was the corpse of John Grimlan.

Shrieking like damned men we broke down the door and fled frenziedly down the well-like staircase where the darkness seemed to clutch at us with clammy black fingers. As we tumbled down into the lower hallway, a lurid glow cut the darkness and the scent of burning wood filled our nostrils.

The outer doorway held momentarily against our frantic assault, then gave way and we hurtled into the outer starlight. Behind us the flames leaped up with a crackling roar as we fled down the hill. Conrad, glancing over his shoulder, halted suddenly, wheeled and flung up his arms like a madman, and screamed,

“Soul and body he sold to Malik Tous, who is Satan, two hundred and fifty years ago! This was the night of payment–and my God–look! *Look!* The Fiend has claimed his own!”

I looked, frozen with horror. Flames had enveloped the whole house with appalling swiftness, and now the great mass was etched against the shadowed sky, a crimson inferno. And above the holocaust hovered a gigantic black shadow like a monstrous bat, and from its dark clutch dangled a small white thing, like the body of a man, dangling limply. Then, even as we cried out in horror, it was gone and our dazed gaze met only the shuddering walls and blazing roof which crumpled into the flames with an earth-shaking roar.

The Song of a Mad Minstrel

I am the thorn in the foot, I am the blur in the sight;

I am the worm at the root, I am the thief in the night.

I am the rat in the wall, the leper that leers at the gate;

I am the ghost in the hall, herald of horror and hate.

I am the rust on the corn, I am the smut on the wheat,

Laughing man’s labor to scorn, weaving a web for his feet.

I am canker and mildew and blight, danger and death and decay; The rot of the rain by night, the blast of the sun by day.

I warp and wither with drouth, I work in the swamp’s foul yeast; I bring the black plague from the south and the leprosy in from the east.

I rend from the hemlock boughs wine steeped in the petals of dooms;
Where the fat black serpents drowse I gather the Upas blooms.

I have plumbed the northern ice for a spell like frozen lead;

In lost gray fields of rice, I have learned from Mongol dead.

Where a bleak black mountain stands I have looted grisly caves; I have digged in the desert sands to plunder terrible graves.

Never the sun goes forth, never the moon glows red,

But out of the south or the north, I come with the slavering dead.

I come with hideous spells, black chants and ghastly tunes;

I have looted the hidden hells and plundered the lost black moons.

There was never a king or priest to cheer me by word or look,

There was never a man or beast in the blood-black ways I took.

There were crimson gulfs unplumbed, there were black wings over a sea;
There were pits where mad things drummed, and foaming blasphemy.

There were vast ungodly tombs where slimy monsters dreamed;

There were clouds like blood-drenched plumes where unborn demons screamed.

There were ages dead to Time, and lands lost out of Space;

There were adders in the slime, and a dim unholy Face.

Oh, the heart in my breast turned stone, and the brain froze in my skull–

But I won through, I alone, and poured my chalice full

Of horrors and dooms and spells, black buds and bitter roots–

From the hells beneath the hells, I bring you my deathly fruits.

The Children of the Night

There were, I remember, six of us in Conrad's bizarrely fashioned study, with its queer relics from all over the world and its long rows of books which ranged from the Mandrake Press edition of Boccaccio to a *Missale Romanum*, bound in clasped oak boards and printed in Venice, 1740. Clemants and Professor Kirowan had just engaged in a somewhat testy anthropological argument: Clemants upholding the theory of a separate, distinct Alpine race, while the professor maintained that this so-called race was merely a deviation from an original Aryan stock–possibly the result of an admixture between the southern or Mediterranean races and the Nordic people.

"And how," asked Clemants, "do you account for their brachycephalicism? The Mediterraneans were as long-headed as the Aryans: would admixture between these dolichocephalic peoples produce a broad-headed intermediate type?"

"Special conditions might bring about a change in an originally long-headed race," snapped Kirowan.

"Boaz has demonstrated, for instance, that in the case of immigrants to America, skull formations often change in one generation. And Flinders Petrie has shown that the Lombards changed from a long-headed to a round-headed race in a few centuries."

"But what caused these changes?"

“Much is yet unknown to science,” answered Kirowan, “and we need not be dogmatic. No one knows, as yet, why people of British and Irish ancestry tend to grow unusually tall in the Darling district of Australia–Cornstalks, as they are called–or why people of such descent generally have thinner jaw-structures after a few generations in New England. The universe is full of the unexplainable.”

“And therefore the uninteresting, according to Machen,” laughed Taverel.

Conrad shook his head. “I must disagree. To me the unknowable is most tantalizingly fascinating.”

“Which accounts, no doubt, for all the works on witchcraft and demonology I see on your shelves,” said Ketrick, with a wave of his hand toward the rows of books.

And let me speak of Ketrick. Each of the six of us was of the same breed–that is to say, a Briton or an American of British descent. By British, I include all natural inhabitants of the British Isles. We represented various strains of English and Celtic blood, but basically, these strains are the same after all.

But Ketrick: to me the man always seemed strangely alien. It was in his eyes that this difference showed externally. They were a sort of amber, almost yellow, and slightly oblique. At times, when one looked at his face from certain angles, they seemed to slant like a Chinaman’s.

Others than I had noticed this feature, so unusual in a man of pure Anglo-Saxon descent. The usual myths ascribing his slanted eyes to some pre-natal influence had been mooted about, and I remember Professor Hendrik Brooler once remarked that Ketrick was undoubtedly an atavism, representing a reversion of type to some dim and distant ancestor of Mongolian blood–a sort of freak reversion, since none of his family showed such traces.

But Ketrick comes of the Welsh branch of the Cetrics of Sussex, and his lineage is set down in the *Book of Peers*. There you may read the line of his ancestry, which extends unbroken to the days of Canute.

No slightest trace of Mongoloid intermixture appears in the genealogy, and how could there have been such intermixture in old Saxon England? For Ketrick is the modern form of Cedric, and though that branch fled into Wales before the invasion of the Danes, its male heirs consistently married with English families on the border marches, and it remains a pure line of the powerful Sussex Cetrics–almost pure Saxon. As for the man himself, this defect of his eyes, if it can be called a defect, is his only abnormality, except for a slight and occasional lisping of speech. He is highly intellectual and a good companion except for a slight aloofness and a rather callous indifference which may serve to mask an extremely sensitive nature.

Referring to his remark, I said with a laugh: “Conrad pursues the obscure and mystic as some men pursue romance; his shelves throng with delightful nightmares of every variety.”

Our host nodded. “You’ll find there a number of delectable dishes–Machen, Poe, Blackwood, Maturin–look, there’s a rare feast– *Horrid Mysteries*, by the Marquis of Grosse–the real Eighteenth Century edition.”

Taverel scanned the shelves. “Weird fiction seems to vie with works on witchcraft, voodoo and dark magic.”

“True; historians and chroniclers are often dull; tale-weavers never–the masters, I mean. A voodoo sacrifice can be described in such a dull manner as to take all the real fantasy out of it, and leave it merely a sordid murder. I will admit that few writers of fiction touch the true heights of horror–most of their stuff is too concrete, given too much earthly shape and dimensions. But in such tales as Poe’s *Fall of the House of Usher*, Machen’s *Black Seal* and Lovecraft’s *Call of Cthulhu*–the three master horror-tales, to my mind–the reader is borne into dark and *outer* realms of imagination.

“But look there,” he continued, “there, sandwiched between that nightmare of Huysmans’, and Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*–Von Junzt’s *Nameless Cults*. There’s a book to keep you awake at night!”

“I’ve read it,” said Taverel, “and I’m convinced the man is mad. His work is like the conversation of a maniac–it runs with startling clarity for awhile, then suddenly merges into vagueness and disconnected ramblings.”

Conrad shook his head. “Have you ever thought that perhaps it is his very sanity that causes him to write in that fashion? What if he dares not put on paper all he knows? What if his vague suppositions are dark and mysterious hints, keys to the puzzle, to those who know?”

“Bosh!” This from Kirowan. “Are you intimating that any of the nightmare cults referred to by Von Junzt survive to this day–if they ever existed save in the hag-ridden brain of a lunatic poet and philosopher?”

“Not he alone used hidden meanings,” answered Conrad. “If you will scan various works of certain great poets you may find double meanings. Men have stumbled on to cosmic secrets in the past and given a hint of them to the world in cryptic words. Do you remember Von Junzt’s hints of ‘a city in the waste’?

What do you think of Flecker’s lines:

“‘Pass not beneath! Men say there blows in stony deserts still a rose

“‘But with no scarlet to her leaf–and from whose heart no perfume flows.’

“Men may stumble upon secret things, but Von Junzt dipped deep into forbidden mysteries. He was one of the few men, for instance, who could read the *Necronomicon* in the original Greek translation.”

Taverel shrugged his shoulders, and Professor Kirowan, though he snorted and puffed viciously at his pipe, made no direct reply; for he, as well as Conrad, had delved into the Latin version of the book, and had found there things not even a cold-blooded scientist could answer or refute.

“Well,” he said presently, “suppose we admit the former existence of cults revolving about such nameless and ghastly gods and entities as Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, Tsathoggua, Gol-goroth, and the like, I can not find it in my mind to believe that survivals of such cults lurk in the dark corners of the world today.”

To our surprize Clemants answered. He was a tall, lean man, silent almost to the point of taciturnity, and his fierce struggles with poverty in his youth

had lined his face beyond his years. Like many another artist, he lived a distinctly dual literary life, his swashbuckling novels furnishing him a generous income, and his editorial position on *The Cloven Hoof* affording him full artistic expression. *The Cloven Hoof* was a poetry magazine whose bizarre contents had often aroused the shocked interest of the conservative critics.

“You remember Von Junzt makes mention of a so-called Bran cult,” said Clemants, stuffing his pipe-bowl with a peculiarly villainous brand of shag tobacco. “I think I heard you and Taverel discussing it once.”

“As I gather from his hints,” snapped Kirowan, “Von Junzt includes this particular cult among those still in existence. Absurd.”

Again Clemants shook his head. “When I was a boy working my way through a certain university, I had for roommate a lad as poor and ambitious as I. If I told you his name, it would startle you. Though he came of an old Scotch line of Galloway, he was obviously of a non-Aryan type.

“This is in strictest confidence, you understand. But my roommate talked in his sleep. I began to listen and put his disjointed mumbling together. And in his mutterings I first heard of the ancient cult hinted at by Von Junzt; of the king who ruled the Dark Empire, which was a revival of an older, darker empire dating back into the Stone Age; and of the great, nameless cavern where stands the Dark Man–the image of Bran Mak Morn, carved in his likeness by a master-hand while the great king yet lived, and to which each worshipper of Bran makes a pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime. Yes, that cult lives today in the descendants of Bran’s people–a silent, unknown current it flows on in the great ocean of life, waiting for the stone image of the great Bran to breathe and move with sudden life, and come from the great cavern to rebuild their lost empire.”

“And who were the people of that empire?” asked Ketrick.

“Picts,” answered Taverel, “doubtless the people known later as the wild Picts of Galloway were predominantly Celtic–a mixture of Gaelic, Cymric, aboriginal and possibly Teutonic elements. Whether they took their name from the older race or lent their own name to that race, is a matter yet to be

decided. But when Von Junzt speaks of Picts, he refers specifically to the small, dark, garlic-eating peoples of Mediterranean blood who brought the Neolithic culture into Britain. The first settlers of that country, in fact, who gave rise to the tales of earth spirits and goblins."

"I can not agree to that last statement," said Conrad. "These legends ascribe a deformity and inhumanness of appearances to the characters. There was nothing about the Picts to excite such horror and repulsion in the Aryan peoples. I believe that the Mediterraneans were preceded by a Mongoloid type, very low in the scale of development, whence these tales–"

"Quite true," broke in Kirowan, "but I hardly think they preceded the Picts, as you call them, into Britain.

We find troll and dwarf legends all over the Continent, and I am inclined to think that both the Mediterranean and Aryan peoples brought these tales with them from the Continent. They must have been of extremely inhuman aspect, those early Mongoloids."

"At least," said Conrad, "here is a flint mallet a miner found in the Welsh hills and gave to me, which has never been fully explained. It is obviously of no ordinary Neolithic make. See how small it is, compared to most implements of that age; almost like a child's toy; yet it is surprizingly heavy and no doubt a deadly blow could be dealt with it. I fitted the handle to it, myself, and you would be surprised to know how difficult it was to carve it into a shape and balance corresponding with the head."

We looked at the thing. It was well made, polished somewhat like the other remnants of the Neolithic I had seen, yet as Conrad said, it was strangely different. Its small size was oddly disquieting, for it had no appearance of a toy, otherwise. It was as sinister in suggestion as an Aztec sacrificial dagger. Conrad had fashioned the oaken handle with rare skill, and in carving it to fit the head, had managed to give it the same unnatural appearance as the mallet itself had. He had even copied the workmanship of primal times, fixing the head into the cleft of the haft with rawhide.

"My word!" Taverel made a clumsy pass at an imaginary antagonist and nearly shattered a costly Shang vase. "The balance of the thing is all off

center; I'd have to readjust all my mechanics of poise and equilibrium to handle it."

"Let me see it," Ketrick took the thing and fumbled with it, trying to strike the secret of its proper handling. At length, somewhat irritated, he swung it up and struck a heavy blow at a shield which hung on the wall near by. I was standing near it; I saw the hellish mallet twist in his hand like a live serpent, and his arm wrenched out of line; I heard a shout of alarmed warning–then darkness came with the impact of the mallet against my head.

Slowly I drifted back to consciousness. First there was dull sensation with blindness and total lack of knowledge as to where I was or what I was; then vague realization of life and being, and a hard something pressing into my ribs. Then the mists cleared and I came to myself completely.

I lay on my back half beneath some underbrush and my head throbbed fiercely. Also my hair was caked and clotted with blood, for the scalp had been laid open. But my eyes traveled down my body and limbs, naked but for a deerskin loin-cloth and sandals of the same material, and found no other wound. That which pressed so uncomfortably into my ribs was my ax, on which I had fallen.

Now an abhorrent babble reached my ears and stung me into clear consciousness. The noise was faintly like language, but not such language as men are accustomed to. It sounded much like the repeated hissing of many great snakes.

I stared. I lay in a great, gloomy forest. The glade was overshadowed, so that even in the daytime it was very dark. Aye–that forest was dark, cold, silent, gigantic and utterly grisly. And I looked into the glade.

I saw a shambles. Five men lay there–at least, what had been five men. Now as I marked the abhorrent mutilations my soul sickened. And about them clustered the–Things. Humans they were, of a sort, though I did not consider them so. They were short and stocky, with broad heads too large for their scrawny bodies. Their hair was snaky and stringy, their faces broad and square, with flat noses, hideously slanted eyes, a thin gash for a mouth, and pointed ears. They wore the skins of beasts, as did I, but these hides

were but crudely dressed. They bore small bows and flint-tipped arrows, flint knives and cudgels. And they conversed in a speech as hideous as themselves, a hissing, reptilian speech that filled me with dread and loathing.

Oh, I hated them as I lay there; my brain flamed with white-hot fury. And now I remembered. We had hunted, we six youths of the Sword People, and had wandered far into that grim forest which our people generally shunned. Weary of the chase, we had paused to rest; to me had been given the first watch, for in those days, no sleep was safe without a sentry. Now shame and revulsion shook my whole being. I had slept–I had betrayed my comrades. And now they lay gashed and mangled–butchered while they slept, by vermin who had never dared to stand before them on equal terms. I, Aryara, had betrayed my trust.

Aye–I remembered. I had slept and in the midst of a dream of the hunt, fire and sparks had exploded in my head and I had plunged into a deeper darkness where there were no dreams. And now the penalty.

They who had stolen through the dense forest and smitten me senseless, had not paused to mutilate me.

Thinking me dead they had hastened swiftly to their grisly work. Now perhaps they had forgotten me for a time. I had sat somewhat apart from the others, and when struck, had fallen half under some bushes.

But soon they would remember me. I would hunt no more, dance no more in the dances of hunt and love and war, see no more the wattle huts of the Sword People.

But I had no wish to escape back to my people. Should I slink back with my tale of infamy and disgrace?

Should I hear the words of scorn my tribe would fling at me, see the girls point their contemptuous fingers at the youth who slept and betrayed his comrades to the knives of vermin?

Tears stung my eyes, and slow hate heaved up in my bosom, and my brain. I would never bear the sword that marked the warrior. I would never triumph over worthy foes and die gloriously beneath the arrows of the Picts or the axes of the Wolf People or the River People. I would go down to death beneath a nauseous rabble, whom the Picts had long ago driven into forest dens like rats.

And mad rage gripped me and dried my tears, giving in their stead a berserk blaze of wrath. If such reptiles were to bring about my downfall, I would make it a fall long remembered–if such beasts had memories.

Moving cautiously, I shifted until my hand was on the haft of my ax; then I called on Il-marinen and bounded up as a tiger springs. And as a tiger springs I was among my enemies and smashed a flat skull as a man crushes the head of a snake. A sudden wild clamor of fear broke from my victims and for an instant they closed round me, hacking and stabbing. A knife gashed my chest but I gave no heed. A red mist waved before my eyes, and my body and limbs moved in perfect accord with my fighting brain.

Snarling, hacking and smiting, I was a tiger among reptiles. In an instant they gave way and fled, leaving me bestriding half a dozen stunted bodies. But I was not satiated.

I was close on the heels of the tallest one, whose head would perhaps come to my shoulder, and who seemed to be their chief. He fled down a sort of runway, squealing like a monstrous lizard, and when I was close at his shoulder, he dived, snake-like, into the bushes. But I was too swift for him, and I dragged him forth and butchered him in a most gory fashion.

And through the bushes I saw the trail he was striving to reach–a path winding in and out among the trees, almost too narrow to allow the traversing of it by a man of normal size. I hacked off my victim’s hideous head, and carrying it in my left hand, went up the serpent-path, with my red ax in my right.

Now as I strode swiftly along the path and blood splashed beside my feet at every step from the severed jugular of my foe, I thought of those I hunted. Aye–we held them in so little esteem, we hunted by day in the forest they

haunted. What they called themselves, we never knew; for none of our tribe ever learned the accursed hissing sibilances they used as speech; but we called them the Children of the Night. And night-things they were indeed, for they slunk in the depths of the dark forests, and in subterraneous dwellings, venturing forth into the hills only when their conquerors slept. It was at night that they did their foul deeds–the quick flight of a flint-tipped arrow to slay cattle, or perhaps a loitering human, the snatching of a child that had wandered from the village.

But it was for more than this we gave them their name; they were, in truth, people of night and darkness and the ancient horror-ridden shadows of bygone ages. For these creatures were very old, and they represented an outworn age. They had once overrun and possessed this land, and they had been driven into hiding and obscurity by the dark, fierce little Picts with whom we contested now, and who hated and loathed them as savagely as did we.

The Picts were different from us in general appearance, being shorter of stature and dark of hair, eyes and skin, whereas we were tall and powerful, with yellow hair and light eyes. But they were cast in the same mold, for all of that. These Children of the Night seemed not human to us, with their deformed dwarfish bodies, yellow skin and hideous faces. Aye–they were reptiles–vermin.

And my brain was like to burst with fury when I thought that it was these vermin on whom I was to glut my ax and perish. Bah! There is no glory slaying snakes or dying from their bites. All this rage and fierce disappointment turned on the objects of my hatred, and with the old red mist waving in front of me I swore by all the gods I knew, to wreak such red havoc before I died as to leave a dread memory in the minds of the survivors.

My people would not honor me, in such contempt they held the Children. But those Children that I left alive would remember me and shudder. So I swore, gripping savagely my ax, which was of bronze, set in a cleft of the oaken haft and fastened securely with rawhide.

Now I heard ahead a sibilant, abhorrent murmur, and a vile stench filtered to me through the trees, human, yet less than human. A few moments more and I emerged from the deep shadows into a wide open space. I had never before seen a village of the Children. There was a cluster of earthen domes, with low doorways sunk into the ground; squalid dwelling-places, half above and half below the earth. And I knew from the talk of the old warriors that these dwelling-places were connected by underground corridors, so the whole village was like an ant-bed, or a system of snake holes. And I wondered if other tunnels did not run off under the ground and emerge long distances from the villages.

Before the domes clustered a vast group of the creatures, hissing and jabbering at a great rate.

I had quickened my pace, and now as I burst from cover, I was running with the fleetness of my race. A wild clamor went up from the rabble as they saw the avenger, tall, blood-stained and blazing-eyed leap from the forest, and I cried out fiercely, flung the dripping head among them and bounded like a wounded tiger into the thick of them.

Oh, there was no escape for them now! They might have taken to their tunnels but I would have followed, even to the guts of hell. They knew they must slay me, and they closed around, a hundred strong, to do it.

There was no wild blaze of glory in my brain as there had been against worthy foes. But the old berserk madness of my race was in my blood and the smell of blood and destruction in my nostrils.

I know not how many I slew. I only know that they thronged about me in a writhing, slashing mass, like serpents about a wolf, and I smote until the ax-edge turned and bent and the ax became no more than a bludgeon; and I smashed skulls, split heads, splintered bones, scattered blood and brains in one red sacrifice to Il-marinen, god of the Sword People.

Bleeding from half a hundred wounds, blinded by a slash across the eyes, I felt a flint knife sink deep into my groin and at the same instant a cudgel laid my scalp open. I went to my knees but reeled up again, and saw in a

thick red fog a ring of leering, slant-eyed faces. I lashed out as a dying tiger strikes, and the faces broke in red ruin.

And as I sagged, overbalanced by the fury of my stroke, a taloned hand clutched my throat and a flint blade was driven into my ribs and twisted venomously. Beneath a shower of blows I went down again, but the man with the knife was beneath me, and with my left hand I found him and broke his neck before he could writhe away.

Life was waning swiftly; through the hissing and howling of the Children I could hear the voice of Il-marinen. Yet once again I rose stubbornly, through a very whirlwind of cudgels and spears. I could no longer see my foes, even in a red mist. But I could feel their blows and knew they surged about me. I braced my feet, gripped my slippery ax-haft with both hands, and calling once more on Il-marinen I heaved up the ax and struck one last terrific blow. And I must have died on my feet, for there was no sensation of falling; even as I knew, with a last thrill of savagery, that I slew, even as I felt the splintering of skulls beneath my ax, darkness came with oblivion.

I came suddenly to myself. I was half reclining in a big armchair and Conrad was pouring water on me.

My head ached and a trickle of blood had half dried on my face. Kirowan, Taverel and Clemants were hovering about, anxiously, while Ketrick stood just in front of me, still holding the mallet, his face schooled to a polite perturbation which his eyes did not show. And at the sight of those cursed eyes a red madness surged up in me.

“There,” Conrad was saying, “I told you he’d come out of it in a moment; just a light crack. He’s taken harder than that. All right now, aren’t you, O’Donnel?”

At that I swept them aside, and with a single low snarl of hatred launched myself at Ketrick. Taken utterly by surprize he had no opportunity to defend himself. My hands locked on his throat and we crashed together on the ruins of a divan. The others cried out in amazement and horror and sprang to separate us–or rather, to tear me from my victim, for already Ketrick’s slant eyes were beginning to start from their sockets.

“For God’s sake, O’Donnel,” exclaimed Conrad, seeking to break my grip, “what’s come over you?

Ketrick didn’t mean to hit you–let go, you idiot!”

A fierce wrath almost overcame me at these men who were my friends, men of my own tribe, and I swore at them and their blindness, as they finally managed to tear my strangling fingers from Ketrick’s throat. He sat up and choked and explored the blue marks my fingers had left, while I raged and cursed, nearly defeating the combined efforts of the four to hold me.

“You fools!” I screamed. “Let me go! Let me do my duty as a tribesman! You blind fools! I care nothing for the paltry blow he dealt me–he and his dealt stronger blows than that against me, in bygone ages. You fools, he is marked with the brand of the beast–the reptile–the vermin we exterminated centuries ago! I must crush him, stamp him out, rid the clean earth of his accursed pollution!”

So I raved and struggled, and Conrad gasped to Ketrick over his shoulder: “Get out, quick! He’s out of his head! His mind is unhinged! Get away from him.”

Now I look out over the ancient dreaming downs and the hills and deep forests beyond and I ponder.

Somehow, that blow from that ancient accursed mallet knocked me back into another age and another life. While I was Aryara I had no cognizance of any other life. It was no dream; it was a stray bit of reality wherein I, John O’Donnel, once lived and died, and back into which I was snatched across the voids of time and space by a chance blow. Time and times are but cogwheels, unmatched, grinding on oblivious to one another. Occasionally–oh, very rarely!–the cogs fit; the pieces of the plot snap together momentarily and give men faint glimpses beyond the veil of this everyday blindness we call reality.

I am John O’Donnel and I was Aryara, who dreamed dreams of war-glory and hunt-glory and feast-glory and who died on a red heap of his victims in some lost age. But in what age and where?

The last I can answer for you. Mountains and rivers change their contours; the landscapes alter; but the downs least of all. I look out upon them now and I remember them, not only with John O'Donnel's eyes, but with the eyes of Aryara. They are but little changed. Only the great forest has shrunk and dwindled and in many, many places vanished utterly. But here on these very downs Aryara lived and fought and loved and in yonder forest he died. Kirowan was wrong. The little, fierce, dark Picts were not the first men in the Isles. There were beings before them–aye, the Children of the Night. Legends–why, the Children were not unknown to us when we came into what is now the isle of Britain. We had encountered them before, ages before. Already we had our myths of them. But we found them in Britain.

Nor had the Picts totally exterminated them.

Nor had the Picts, as so many believe, preceded us by many centuries. We drove them before us as we came, in that long drift from the East. I, Aryara, knew old men who had marched on that century-long trek; who had been borne in the arms of yellow-haired women over countless miles of forest and plain, and who as youths had walked in the vanguard of the invaders.

As to the age–that I can not say. But I, Aryara, was surely an Aryan and my people were Aryans–members of one of the thousand unknown and unrecorded drifts that scattered yellow-haired, blue-eyed tribes all over the world. The Celts were not the first to come into western Europe. I, Aryara, was of the same blood and appearance as the men who sacked Rome, but mine was a much older strain.

Of the language I spoke, no echo remains in the waking mind of John O'Donnel, but I knew that Aryara's tongue was to ancient Celtic what ancient Celtic is to modern Gaelic.

Il-marinen! I remember the god I called upon, the ancient, ancient god who worked in metals–in bronze then. For Il-marinen was one of the base gods of the Aryans from whom many gods grew; and he was Wieland and Vulcan in the ages of iron. But to Aryara he was Il-marinen.

And Aryara–he was one of many tribes and many drifts. Not alone did the Sword People come or dwell in Britain. The River People were before us

and the Wolf People came later. But they were Aryans like us, light-eyed and tall and blond. We fought them, for the reason that the various drifts of Aryans have always fought each other, just as the Achaeans fought the Dorians, just as the Celts and Germans cut each other's throats; aye, just as the Hellenes and the Persians, who were once one people and of the same drift, split in two different ways on the long trek and centuries later met and flooded Greece and Asia Minor with blood.

Now understand, all this I did not know as Aryara. I, Aryara, knew nothing of all these world-wide drifts of my race. I knew only that my people were conquerors, that a century ago my ancestors had dwelt in the great plains far to the east, plains populous with fierce, yellow-haired, light-eyed people like myself; that my ancestors had come westward in a great drift; and that in that drift, when my tribesmen met tribes of other races, they trampled and destroyed them, and when they met other yellow-haired, light-eyed people, of older or newer drifts, they fought savagely and mercilessly, according to the old, illogical custom of the Aryan people. This Aryara knew, and I, John O'Donnel, who know much more and much less than I, Aryara, knew, have combined the knowledge of these separate selves and have come to conclusions that would startle many noted scientists and historians.

Yet this fact is well known: Aryans deteriorate swiftly in sedentary and peaceful life. Their proper existence is a nomadic one; when they settle down to an agricultural existence, they pave the way for their downfall; and when they pen themselves in with city walls, they seal their doom. Why, I, Aryara, remember the tales of the old men–how the Sons of the Sword, on that long drift, found villages of white-skinned, yellow-haired people who had drifted into the west centuries before and had quit the wandering life to dwell among the dark, garlic-eating people and gain their sustenance from the soil. And the old men told how soft and weak they were, and how easily they fell before the bronze blades of the Sword People.

Look–is not the whole history of the Sons of Aryan laid on those lines? Look–how swiftly has Persian followed Mede; Greek, Persian; Roman, Greek; and German, Roman. Aye, and the Norsemen followed the Germanic tribes when they had grown flabby from a century or so of peace and idleness, and despoiled the spoils they had taken in the southland.

But let me speak of Ketrick. Ha–the short hairs at the back of my neck bristle at the very mention of his name. An atavism–aye! A reversion to type–but not to the type of some cleanly Chinaman or Mongol of recent times. The Danes drove his ancestors into the hills of Wales; and there, in what mediaeval century, and in what foul way did that cursed aboriginal taint creep into the clean Saxon blood of the Celtic line, there to lie dormant so long? The Celtic Welsh never mated with the Children any more than the Picts did. But there must have been survivals–vermin lurking in those grim hills, that had outlasted their time and age. In Aryara's day they were scarcely human. What must a thousand years of retrogression have done to the breed?

What foul shape stole into the Ketrick castle on some forgotten night, or rose out of the dusk to grip some woman of the line, straying in the hills?

The mind shrinks from such an image. But this I know: there must have been survivals of that foul, reptilian epoch when the Ketricks went into Wales. There still may be. But this changeling, this waif of darkness, this horror who bears the noble name of Ketrick, the brand of the serpent is upon him, and until he is destroyed there is no rest for me. Now that I know him for what he is, he pollutes the clean air and leaves the slime of the snake on the green earth. The sound of his lisping, hissing voice fills me with crawling horror and the sight of his slanted eyes inspires me with madness.

For I come of a royal race, and such as he is a continual insult and a threat, like a serpent under foot.

Mine is a regal race, though now it is become degraded and falls into decay by continual admixture with conquered races. The waves of alien blood have washed my hair black and my skin dark, but I still have the lordly stature and the blue eyes of a royal Aryan.

And as my ancestors–as I, Aryara, destroyed the scum that writhed beneath our heels, so shall I, John O'Donnel, exterminate the reptilian thing, the monster bred of the snaky taint that slumbered so long unguessed in clean Saxon veins, the vestigial serpent-things left to taunt the Sons of Aryan. They say the blow I received affected my mind; I know it but opened my

eyes. Mine ancient enemy walks often on the moors alone, attracted, though he may not know it, by ancestral urgings. And on one of these lonely walks I shall meet him, and when I meet him, I will break his foul neck with my hands, as I, Aryara, broke the necks of foul night-things in the long, long ago.

Then they may take me and break my neck at the end of a rope if they will. I am not blind, if my friends are. And in the sight of the old Aryan god, if not in the blinded eyes of men, I will have kept faith with my tribe.

Musings

The little poets sing of little things:

Hope, cheer, and faith, small queens and puppet kings;

Lovers who kissed and then were made as one,

And modest flowers waving in the sun.

The mighty poets write in blood and tears

And agony that, flame-like, bites and sears.

They reach their mad blind hands into the night,

To plumb abysses dead to human sight;

To drag from gulfs where lunacy lies curled,

Mad, monstrous nightmare shapes to blast the world.

The Black Stone

They say foul beings of Old Times still lurk

In dark forgotten corners of the world,

And Gates still gape to loose, on certain nights,

Shapes pent in Hell.

–*Justin Geoffrey*

I read of it first in the strange book of Von Junzt, the German eccentric who lived so curiously and died in such grisly and mysterious fashion. It was my fortune to have access to his *Nameless Cults* in the original edition, the so-called Black Book, published in Düsseldorf in 1839, shortly before a hounding doom overtook the author. Collectors of rare literature are familiar with *Nameless Cults* mainly through the cheap and faulty translation which was pirated in London by Bridewall in 1845, and the carefully expurgated edition put out by the Golden Goblin Press of New York in 1909. But the volume I stumbled upon was one of the unexpurgated German copies, with heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen such volumes in the entire world today, for the quantity issued was not great, and when the manner of the author's demise was bruited about, many possessors of the book burned their volumes in panic.

Von Junzt spent his entire life (1795–1840) delving into forbidden subjects; he traveled in all parts of the world, gained entrance into innumerable secret societies, and read countless little-known and esoteric books and manuscripts in the original; and in the chapters of the Black Book, which range from startling clarity of exposition to murky ambiguity, there are statements and hints to freeze the blood of a thinking man. Reading what Von Junzt *dared* put in print arouses uneasy speculations as to what it was that he dared not tell. What dark matters, for instance, were contained in those closely written pages that formed the unpublished manuscript on which he worked unceasingly for months before his death, and which lay torn and scattered all over the floor of the locked and bolted chamber in which Von Junzt was found dead with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat? It will never be known, for the author's closest friend, the Frenchman Alexis Ladeau, after having spent a whole night piecing the fragments together and reading what was written, burnt them to ashes and cut his own throat with a razor.

But the contents of the published matter are shuddersome enough, even if one accepts the general view that they but represent the ravings of a

madman. There among many strange things I found mention of the Black Stone, that curious, sinister monolith that broods among the mountains of Hungary, and about which so many dark legends cluster. Van Junzt did not devote much space to it–the bulk of his grim work concerns cults and objects of dark worship which he maintained existed in his day, and it would seem that the Black Stone represents some order or being lost and forgotten centuries ago. But he spoke of it as one of the keys–a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, and constituting one of the obscurities of his work. And he hinted briefly at curious sights to be seen about the monolith on Midsummer's Night. He mentioned Otto Dostmann's theory that this monolith was a remnant of the Hunnish invasion and had been erected to commemorate a victory of Attila over the Goths. Von Junzt contradicted this assertion without giving any refutory facts, merely remarking that to attribute the origin of the Black Stone to the Huns was as logical as assuming that William the Conqueror reared Stonehenge.

This implication of enormous antiquity piqued my interest immensely and after some difficulty I succeeded in locating a rat-eaten and moldering copy of Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires* (Berlin, 1809,

"Der Drachenhaus" Press). I was disappointed to find that Dostmann referred to the Black Stone even more briefly than had Von Junzt, dismissing it with a few lines as an artifact comparatively modern in contrast with the Greco-Roman ruins of Asia Minor which were his pet theme. He admitted his inability to make out the defaced characters on the monolith but pronounced them unmistakably Mongoloid.

However, little as I learned from Dostmann, he did mention the name of the village adjacent to the Black Stone–Stregoicavar–an ominous name, meaning something like Witch-Town.

A close scrutiny of guide-books and travel articles gave me no further information–Stregoicavar, not on any map that I could find, lay in a wild, little-frequented region, out of the path of casual tourists. But I did find subject for thought in Dornly's *Magyar Folklore*. In his chapter on *Dream Myths* he mentions the Black Stone and tells of some curious superstitions regarding it–especially the belief that if any one sleeps in the vicinity of the monolith, that person will be haunted by monstrous nightmares for ever

after; and he cited tales of the peasants regarding too-curious people who ventured to visit the Stone on Midsummer Night and who died raving mad because of *something* they saw there.

That was all I could glean from Dornly, but my interest was even more intensely roused as I sensed a distinctly sinister aura about the Stone. The suggestion of dark antiquity, the recurrent hint of unnatural events on Midsummer Night, touched some slumbering instinct in my being, as one senses, rather than hears, the flowing of some dark subterraneous river in the night.

And I suddenly saw a connection between this Stone and a certain weird and fantastic poem written by the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey: *The People of the Monolith*. Inquiries led to the information that Geoffrey had indeed written that poem while traveling in Hungary, and I could not doubt that the Black Stone was the very monolith to which he referred in his strange verse. Reading his stanzas again, I felt once more the strange dim stirrings of subconscious promptings that I had noticed when first reading of the Stone.

I had been casting about for a place to spend a short vacation and I made up my mind. I went to Stregoicavar. A train of obsolete style carried me from Temesvar to within striking distance, at least, of my objective, and a three days' ride in a jouncing coach brought me to the little village which lay in a fertile valley high up in the fir-clad mountains. The journey itself was uneventful, but during the first day we passed the old battlefield of Schomvaal where the brave Polish-Hungarian knight, Count Boris Vladinoff, made his gallant and futile stand against the victorious hosts of Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Grand Turk swept over eastern Europe in 1526.

The driver of the coach pointed out to me a great heap of crumbling stones on a hill near by, under which, he said, the bones of the brave Count lay. I remembered a passage from Larson's *Turkish Wars*:

"After the skirmish" (in which the Count with his small army had beaten back the Turkish advance-guard)

“the Count was standing beneath the half-ruined walls of the old castle on the hill, giving orders as to the disposition of his forces, when an aide brought to him a small lacquered case which had been taken from the body of the famous Turkish scribe and historian, Selim Bahadur, who had fallen in the fight. The Count took therefrom a roll of parchment and began to read, but he had not read far before he turned very pale and, without saying a word, replaced the parchment in the case and thrust the case into his cloak. At that very instant a hidden Turkish battery suddenly opened fire, and the balls striking the old castle, the Hungarians were horrified to see the walls crash down in ruin, completely covering the brave Count. Without a leader the gallant little army was cut to pieces, and in the war-swept years which followed, the bones of the noblemen were never recovered. Today the natives point out a huge and moldering pile of ruins near Schomvaal beneath which, they say, still rests all that the centuries have left of Count Boris Vladinoff.”

I found the village of Stregoicavar a dreamy, drowsy little village that apparently belied its sinister cognomen–a forgotten back-eddy that Progress had passed by. The quaint houses and the quainter dress and manners of the people were those of an earlier century. They were friendly, mildly curious but not inquisitive, though visitors from the outside world were extremely rare.

“Ten years ago another American came here and stayed a few days in the village,” said the owner of the tavern where I had put up, “a young fellow and queer-acting–mumbled to himself–a poet, I think.”

I knew he must mean Justin Geoffrey.

“Yes, he was a poet,” I answered, “and he wrote a poem about a bit of scenery near this very village.”

“Indeed?” Mine host’s interest was aroused. “Then, since all great poets are strange in their speech and actions, he must have achieved great fame, for his actions and conversations were the strangest of any man I ever knew.”

“As is usual with artists,” I answered, “most of his recognition has come since his death.”

“He is dead, then?”

“He died screaming in a madhouse five years ago.”

“Too bad, too bad,” sighed mine host sympathetically. “Poor lad–he looked too long at the Black Stone.”

My heart gave a leap, but I masked my keen interest and said casually: “I have heard something of this Black Stone; somewhere near this village, is it not?”

“Nearer than Christian folk wish,” he responded. “Look!” He drew me to a latticed window and pointed up at the fir-clad slopes of the brooding blue mountains. “There beyond where you see the bare face of that jutting cliff stands that accursed Stone. Would that it were ground to powder and the powder flung into the Danube to be carried to the deepest ocean! Once men tried to destroy the thing, but each man who laid hammer or maul against it came to an evil end. So now the people shun it.”

“What is there so evil about it?” I asked curiously.

“It is a demon-haunted thing,” he answered uneasily and with the suggestion of a shudder. “In my childhood I knew a young man who came up from below and laughed at our traditions–in his foolhardiness he went to the Stone one Midsummer Night and at dawn stumbled into the village again, stricken dumb and mad. Something had shattered his brain and sealed his lips, for until the day of his death, which came soon after, he spoke only to utter terrible blasphemies or to slaver gibberish.

“My own nephew when very small was lost in the mountains and slept in the woods near the Stone, and now in his manhood he is tortured by foul dreams, so that at times he makes the night hideous with his screams and wakes with cold sweat upon him.

“But let us talk of something else, *Herr*; it is not good to dwell upon such things.”

I remarked on the evident age of the tavern and he answered with pride: “The foundations are more than four hundred years old; the original house was the only one in the village which was not burned to the ground when Suleiman’s devils swept through the mountains. Here, in the house that then stood on these same foundations, it is said, the scribe Selim Bahadur had his headquarters while ravaging the country hereabouts.”

I learned then that the present inhabitants of Stregoicavar are not descendants of the people who dwelt there before the Turkish raid of 1526. The victorious Moslems left no living human in the village or the vicinity thereabouts when they passed over. Men, women and children they wiped out in one red holocaust of murder, leaving a vast stretch of country silent and utterly deserted. The present people of Stregoicavar are descended from hardy settlers from the lower valleys who came into the upper levels and rebuilt the ruined village after the Turk was thrust back.

Mine host did not speak of the extermination of the original inhabitants with any great resentment and I learned that his ancestors in the lower levels had looked on the mountaineers with even more hatred and aversion than they regarded the Turks. He was rather vague regarding the causes of this feud, but said that the original inhabitants of Stregoicavar had been in the habit of making stealthy raids on the lowlands and stealing girls and children. Moreover, he said that they were not exactly of the same blood as his own people; the sturdy, original Magyar-Slavic stock had mixed and intermarried with a degraded aboriginal race until the breeds had blended, producing an unsavory amalgamation. Who these aborigines were, he had not the slightest idea, but maintained that they were “pagans” and had dwelt in the mountains since time immemorial, before the coming of the conquering peoples.

I attached little importance to this tale; seeing in it merely a parallel to the amalgamation of Celtic tribes with Mediterranean aborigines in the Galloway hills, with the resultant mixed race which, as Picts, has such an extensive part in Scotch legendry. Time has a curiously foreshortening effect on folklore, and just as tales of the Picts became intertwined with legends of an older Mongoloid race, so that eventually the Picts were ascribed the repulsive appearance of the squat primitives, whose

individuality merged, in the telling, into Pictish tales, and was forgotten; so, I felt, the supposed inhuman attributes of the first villagers of Stregoicavar could be traced to older, outworn myths with invading Huns and Mongols.

The morning after my arrival I received directions from mine host, who gave them worriedly, and set out to find the Black Stone. A few hours' tramp up the fir-covered slopes brought me to the face of the rugged, solid stone cliff which jutted boldly from the mountainside. A narrow trail wound up it, and mounting this, I looked out over the peaceful valley of Stregoicavar, which seemed to drowse, guarded on either hand by the great blue mountains. No huts or any sign of human tenancy showed between the cliff whereon I stood and the village. I saw numbers of scattering farms in the valley but all lay on the other side of Stregoicavar, which itself seemed to shrink from the brooding slopes which masked the Black Stone.

The summit of the cliffs proved to be a sort of thickly wooded plateau. I made my way through the dense growth for a short distance and came into a wide glade; and in the center of the glade reared a gaunt figure of black stone.

It was octagonal in shape, some sixteen feet in height and about a foot and a half thick. It had once evidently been highly polished, but now the surface was thickly dinted as if savage efforts had been made to demolish it; but the hammers had done little more than to flake off small bits of stone and mutilate the characters which once had evidently marched up in a spiraling line round and round the shaft to the top.

Up to ten feet from the base these characters were almost completely blotted out, so that it was very difficult to trace their direction. Higher up they were plainer, and I managed to squirm part of the way up the shaft and scan them at close range. All were more or less defaced, but I was positive that they symbolized no language now remembered on the face of the earth. I am fairly familiar with all hieroglyphics known to researchers and philologists and I can say with certainty that those characters were like nothing of which I have ever read or heard. The nearest approach to them that I ever saw were some crude scratches on a gigantic and strangely symmetrical rock in a lost valley of Yucatan. I remember that when I pointed out these marks to the archeologist who was my companion, he

maintained that they either represented natural weathering or the idle scratching of some Indian. To my theory that the rock was really the base of a long-vanished column, he merely laughed, calling my attention to the dimensions of it, which suggested, if it were built with any natural rules of architectural symmetry, a column a thousand feet high. But I was not convinced.

I will not say that the characters on the Black Stone were similar to those on that colossal rock in Yucatan; but one suggested the other. As to the substance of the monolith, again I was baffled. The stone of which it was composed was a dully gleaming black, whose surface, where it was not dinted and roughened, created a curious illusion of semi-transparency.

I spent most of the morning there and came away baffled. No connection of the Stone with any other artifact in the world suggested itself to me. It was as if the monolith had been reared by alien hands, in an age distant and apart from human ken.

I returned to the village with my interest in no way abated. Now that I had seen the curious thing, my desire was still more keenly whetted to investigate the matter further and seek to learn by what strange hands and for what strange purpose the Black Stone had been reared in the long ago.

I sought out the tavern-keeper’s nephew and questioned him in regard to his dreams, but he was vague, though willing to oblige. He did not mind discussing them, but was unable to describe them with any clarity. Though he dreamed the same dreams repeatedly, and though they were hideously vivid at the time, they left no distinct impression on his waking mind. He remembered them only as chaotic nightmares through which huge whirling fires shot lurid tongues of flame and a black drum bellowed incessantly. One thing only he clearly remembered–in one dream he had seen the Black Stone, not on a mountain slope but set like a spire on a colossal black castle.

As for the rest of the villagers I found them not inclined to talk about the Stone, with the exception of the schoolmaster, a man of surprizing education, who spent much more of his time out in the world than any of the rest.

He was much interested in what I told him of Von Junzt's remarks about the Stone, and warmly agreed with the German author in the alleged age of the monolith. He believed that a coven had once existed in the vicinity and that possibly all of the original villagers had been members of that fertility cult which once threatened to undermine European civilization and gave rise to the tales of witchcraft. He cited the very name of the village to prove his point; it had not been originally named Stregoicavar, he said; according to legends the builders had called it Xuthltan, which was the aboriginal name of the site on which the village had been built many centuries ago.

This fact roused again an indescribable feeling of uneasiness. The barbarous name did not suggest connection with any Scythic, Slavic or Mongolian race to which an aboriginal people of these mountains would, under natural circumstances, have belonged.

That the Magyars and Slavs of the lower valleys believed the original inhabitants of the village to be members of the witchcraft cult was evident, the schoolmaster said, by the name they gave it, which name continued to be used even after the older settlers had been massacred by the Turks, and the village rebuilt by a cleaner and more wholesome breed.

He did not believe that the members of the cult erected the monolith but he did believe that they used it as a center of their activities, and repeating vague legends which had been handed down since before the Turkish invasion, he advanced the theory that the degenerate villagers had used it as a sort of altar on which they offered human sacrifices, using as victims the girls and babies stolen from his own ancestors in the lower valleys.

He discounted the myths of weird events on Midsummer Night, as well as a curious legend of a strange deity which the witch-people of Xuthltan were said to have invoked with chants and wild rituals of flagellation and slaughter.

He had never visited the Stone on Midsummer Night, he said, but he would not fear to do so; whatever *had* existed or taken place there in the past, had been long engulfed in the mists of time and oblivion. The Black Stone had lost its meaning save as a link to a dead and dusty past.

It was while returning from a visit with this schoolmaster one night about a week after my arrival at Stregoicavar that a sudden recollection struck me–it was Midsummer Night! The very time that the legends linked with grisly implications to the Black Stone. I turned away from the tavern and strode swiftly through the village. Stregoicavar lay silent; the villagers retired early. I saw no one as I passed rapidly out of the village and up into the firs which masked the mountain slopes with whispering darkness.

A broad silver moon hung above the valley, flooding the crags and slopes in a weird light and etching the shadows blackly. No wind blew through the firs, but a mysterious, intangible rustling and whispering was abroad. Surely on such nights in past centuries, my whimsical imagination told me, naked witches astride magic broomsticks had flown across the valley, pursued by jeering demoniac familiars.

I came to the cliffs and was somewhat disquieted to note that the illusive moonlight lent them a subtle appearance I had not noticed before–in the weird light they appeared less like natural cliffs and more like the ruins of cyclopean and Titan-reared battlements jutting from the mountain-slope.

Shaking off this hallucination with difficulty I came upon the plateau and hesitated a moment before I plunged into the brooding darkness of the woods. A sort of breathless tenseness hung over the shadows, like an unseen monster holding its breath lest it scare away its prey.

I shook off the sensation–a natural one, considering the eeriness of the place and its evil reputation–and made my way through the wood, experiencing a most unpleasant sensation that I was being followed, and halting once, sure that something clammy and unstable had brushed against my face in the darkness.

I came out into the glade and saw the tall monolith rearing its gaunt height above the sward. At the edge of the woods on the side toward the cliffs was a stone which formed a sort of natural seat. I sat down, reflecting that it was probably while there that the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey, had written his fantastic *People of the Monolith*. Mine host thought that it was the Stone which had caused Geoffrey's insanity, but the seeds of madness had been sown in the poet's brain long before he ever came to Stregoicavar.

A glance at my watch showed that the hour of midnight was close at hand. I leaned back, waiting whatever ghostly demonstration might appear. A thin night wind started up among the branches of the firs, with an uncanny suggestion of faint, unseen pipes whispering an eery and evil tune. The monotony of the sound and my steady gazing at the monolith produced a sort of self-hypnosis upon me; I grew drowsy. I fought this feeling, but sleep stole on me in spite of myself; the monolith seemed to sway and dance, strangely distorted to my gaze, and then I slept.

I opened my eyes and sought to rise, but lay still, as if an icy hand gripped me helpless. Cold terror stole over me. The glade was no longer deserted. It was thronged by a silent crowd of strange people, and my distended eyes took in strange barbaric details of costume which my reason told me were archaic and forgotten even in this backward land. Surely, I thought, these are villagers who have come here to hold some fantastic conclave–but another glance told me that these people were not of the folk of Stregoicavar. They were a shorter, more squat race, whose brows were lower, whose faces were broader and duller. Some had Slavic and Magyar features, but those features were degraded as from a mixture of some baser, alien strain I could not classify. Many wore the hides of wild beasts, and their whole appearance, both men and women, was one of sensual brutishness. They terrified and repelled me, but they gave me no heed. They formed in a vast half-circle in front of the monolith and began a sort of chant, flinging their arms in unison and weaving their bodies rhythmically from the waist upward. All eyes were fixed on the top of the Stone which they seemed to be invoking. But the strangest of all was the dimness of their voices; not fifty yards from me hundreds of men and women were unmistakably lifting their voices in a wild chant, yet those voices came to me as a faint indistinguishable murmur as if from across vast leagues of Space–or *time*.

Before the monolith stood a sort of brazier from which a vile, nauseous yellow smoke billowed upward, curling curiously in an undulating spiral around the black shaft, like a vast unstable serpent.

On one side of this brazier lay two figures–a young girl, stark naked and bound hand and foot, and an infant, apparently only a few months old. On

the other side of the brazier squatted a hideous old hag with a queer sort of black drum on her lap; this drum she beat with slow, light blows of her open palms, but I could not hear the sound.

The rhythm of the swaying bodies grew faster and into the space between the people and the monolith sprang a naked young woman, her eyes blazing, her long black hair flying loose. Spinning dizzily on her toes, she whirled across the open space and fell prostrate before the Stone, where she lay motionless.

The next instant a fantastic figure followed her–a man from whose waist hung a goatskin, and whose features were entirely hidden by a sort of mask made from a huge wolf ’s head, so that he looked like a monstrous, nightmare being, horribly compounded of elements both human and bestial. In his hand he held a bunch of long fir switches bound together at the larger ends, and the moonlight glinted on a chain of heavy gold looped about his neck. A smaller chain depending from it suggested a pendant of some sort, but this was missing.

The people tossed their arms violently and seemed to redouble their shouts as this grotesque creature loped across the open space with many a fantastic leap and caper. Coming to the woman who lay before the monolith, he began to lash her with the switches he bore, and she leaped up and spun into the wild mazes of the most incredible dance I have ever seen. And her tormentor danced with her, keeping the wild rhythm, matching her every whirl and bound, while incessantly raining cruel blows on her naked body. And at every blow he shouted a single word, over and over, and all the people shouted it back. I could see the working of their lips, and now the faint far-off murmur of their voices merged and blended into one distant shout, repeated over and over with slobbering ecstasy. But what that one word was, I could not make out.

In dizzy whirls spun the wild dancers, while the lookers-on, standing still in their tracks, followed the rhythm of their dance with swaying bodies and weaving arms. Madness grew in the eyes of the capering votaress and was reflected in the eyes of the watchers. Wilder and more extravagant grew the whirling frenzy of that mad dance–it became a bestial and obscene thing,

while the old hag howled and battered the drum like a crazy woman, and the switches cracked out a devil's tune.

Blood trickled down the dancer's limbs but she seemed not to feel the lashing save as a stimulus for further enormities of outrageous motion; bounding into the midst of the yellow smoke which now spread out tenuous tentacles to embrace both flying figures, she seemed to merge with that foul fog and veil herself with it. Then emerging into plain view, closely followed by the beast-thing that flogged her, she shot into an indescribable, explosive burst of dynamic mad motion, and on the very crest of that mad wave, she dropped suddenly to the sward, quivering and panting as if completely overcome by her frenzied exertions. The lashing continued with unabated violence and intensity and she began to wriggle toward the monolith on her belly. The priest–or such I will call him–followed, lashing her unprotected body with all the power of his arm as she writhed along, leaving a heavy track of blood on the trampled earth. She reached the monolith, and gasping and panting, flung both arms about it and covered the cold stone with fierce hot kisses, as in frenzied and unholy adoration.

The fantastic priest bounded high in the air, flinging away the red-dabbled switches, and the worshippers, howling and foaming at the mouths, turned on each other with tooth and nail, rending one another's garments and flesh in a blind passion of bestiality. The priest swept up the infant with a long arm, and shouting again that Name, whirled the wailing babe high in the air and dashed its brains out against the monolith, leaving a ghastly stain on the black surface. Cold with horror I saw him rip the tiny body open with his bare brutish fingers and fling handfuls of blood on the shaft, then toss the red and torn shape into the brazier, extinguishing flame and smoke in a crimson rain, while the maddened brutes behind him howled over and over that Name. Then suddenly they all fell prostrate, writhing like snakes, while the priest flung wide his gory hands as in triumph. I opened my mouth to scream my horror and loathing, but only a dry rattle sounded; a huge monstrous toad-like *thing* squatted on the top of the monolith!

I saw its bloated, repulsive and unstable outline against the moonlight, and set in what would have been the face of a natural creature, its huge, blinking eyes which reflected all the lust, abysmal greed, obscene cruelty and

monstrous evil that has stalked the sons of men since their ancestors mowed blind and hairless in the tree-tops. In those grisly eyes were mirrored all the unholy things and vile secrets that sleep in the cities under the sea, and that skulk from the light of day in the blackness of primordial caverns. And so that ghastly thing that the unhallowed ritual of cruelty and sadism and blood had evoked from the silence of the hills, leered and blinked down on its bestial worshippers, who groveled in abhorrent abasement before it.

Now the beast-masked priest lifted the bound and weakly writhing girl in his brutish hands and held her up toward that horror on the monolith. And as that monstrosity sucked in its breath, lustfully and slobberingly, something snapped in my brain and I fell into a merciful faint.

I opened my eyes on a still white dawn. All the events of the night rushed back on me and I sprang up, then stared about me in amazement. The monolith brooded gaunt and silent above the sward which waved, green and untrampled, in the morning breeze. A few quick strides took me across the glade; here had the dancers leaped and bounded until the ground should have been trampled bare, and here had the votaress wriggled her painful way to the Stone, streaming blood on the earth. But no drop of crimson showed on the uncrushed sward. I looked, shudderingly, at the side of the monolith against which the bestial priest had brained the stolen baby–but no dark stain nor grisly clot showed there.

A dream! It had been a wild nightmare–or else–I shrugged my shoulders. What vivid clarity for a dream!

I returned quietly to the village and entered the inn without being seen. And there I sat meditating over the strange events of the night. More and more was I prone to discard the dream-theory. That what I had seen was illusion and without material substance, was evident. But I believed that I had looked on the mirrored shadow of a deed perpetrated in ghastly actuality in bygone days. But how was I to know?

What proof to show that my vision had been a gathering of foul specters rather than a mere nightmare originating in my own brain?

As if for answer a name flashed into my mind–Selim Bahadur! According to legend this man, who had been a soldier as well as a scribe, had commanded that part of Suleiman's army which had devastated Stregoicavar; it seemed logical enough; and if so, he had gone straight from the blotted-out countryside to the bloody field of Schomvaal, and his doom. I sprang up with a sudden shout–that manuscript which was taken from the Turk's body, and which Count Boris shuddered over–might it not contain some narration of what the conquering Turks found in Stregoicavar? What else could have shaken the iron nerves of the Polish adventurer? And since the bones of the Count had never been recovered, what more certain than that the lacquered case, with its mysterious contents, still lay hidden beneath the ruins that covered Boris Vladinoff? I began packing my bag with fierce haste.

Three days later found me ensconced in a little village a few miles from the old battlefield, and when the moon rose I was working with savage intensity on the great pile of crumbling stone that crowned the hill.

It was back-breaking toil–looking back now I can not see how I accomplished it, though I labored without a pause from moonrise to dawn. Just as the sun was coming up I tore aside the last tangle of stones and looked on all that was mortal of Count Boris Vladinoff–only a few pitiful fragments of crumbling bone–and among them, crushed out of all original shape, lay a case whose lacquered surface had kept it from complete decay through the centuries.

I seized it with frenzied eagerness, and piling back some of the stones on the bones I hurried away; for I did not care to be discovered by the suspicious peasants in an act of apparent desecration.

Back in my tavern chamber I opened the case and found the parchment comparatively intact; and there was something else in the case–a small squat object wrapped in silk. I was wild to plumb the secrets of those yellowed pages, but weariness forbade me. Since leaving Stregoicavar I had hardly slept at all, and the terrific exertions of the previous night combined to overcome me. In spite of myself I was forced to stretch myself on my bed, nor did I awake until sundown.

I snatched a hasty supper, and then in the light of a flickering candle, I set myself to read the neat Turkish characters that covered the parchment. It was difficult work, for I am not deeply versed in the language and the archaic style of the narrative baffled me. But as I toiled through it a word or a phrase here and there leaped at me and a dimly growing horror shook me in its grip. I bent my energies fiercely to the task, and as the tale grew clearer and took more tangible form my blood chilled in my veins, my hair stood up and my tongue clove to my mouth. All external things partook of the grisly madness of that infernal manuscript until the night sounds of insects and creatures in the woods took the form of ghastly murmurings and stealthy treadings of ghoulish horrors and the sighing of the night wind changed to tittering obscene gloating of evil over the souls of men.

At last when gray dawn was stealing through the latticed window, I laid down the manuscript and took up and unwrapped the thing in the bit of silk. Staring at it with haggard eyes I knew the truth of the matter was clinched, even had it been possible to doubt the veracity of that terrible manuscript.

And I replaced both obscene things in the case, nor did I rest or sleep or eat until that case containing them had been weighted with stones and flung into the deepest current of the Danube which, God grant, carried them back into the Hell from which they came.

It was no dream I dreamed on Midsummer Midnight in the hills above Stregoicavar. Well for Justin Geoffrey that he tarried there only in the sunlight and went his way, for had he gazed upon that ghastly conclave, his mad brain would have snapped before it did. How my own reason held, I do not know.

No–it was no dream–I gazed upon a foul rout of votaries long dead, come up from Hell to worship as of old; ghosts that bowed before a ghost. For Hell has long claimed their hideous god. Long, long he dwelt among the hills, a brain-shattering vestige of an outworn age, but no longer his obscene talons clutch for the souls of living men, and his kingdom is a dead kingdom, peopled only by the ghosts of those who served him in his lifetime and theirs.

By what foul alchemy or godless sorcery the Gates of Hell are opened on that one eery night I do not know, but mine own eyes have seen. And I know I looked on no living thing that night, for the manuscript written in the careful hand of Selim Bahadur narrated at length what he and his raiders found in the valley of Stregoicavar; and I read, set down in detail, the blasphemous obscenities that torture wrung from the lips of screaming worshippers; and I read, too, of the lost, grim black cavern high in the hills where the horrified Turks hemmed a monstrous, bloated, wallowing toad-like being and slew it with flame and ancient steel blessed in old times by Muhammad, and with incantations that were old when Arabia was young. And even staunch old Selim's hand shook as he recorded the cataclysmic, earth-shaking death-howls of the monstrosity, which died not alone; for a half-score of his slayers perished with him, in ways that Selim would not or could not describe.

And that squat idol carved of gold and wrapped in silk was an image of *himself*, and Selim tore it from the golden chain that looped the neck of the slain high priest of the mask.

Well that the Turks swept that foul valley with torch and cleanly steel! Such sights as those brooding mountains have looked on belong to the darkness and abysses of lost eons. No–it is not fear of the toad-thing that makes me shudder in the night. He is made fast in Hell with his nauseous horde, freed only for an hour on the most weird night of the year, as I have seen. And of his worshippers, none remains.

But it is the realization that such things once crouched beast-like above the souls of men which brings cold sweat to my brow; and I fear to peer again into the leaves of Von Junzt's abomination. For now I understand his repeated phrase of *keys*!–aye! Keys to Outer Doors–links with an abhorrent past and–who knows?–of abhorrent spheres of the *present*. And I understand why the cliffs look like battlements in the moonlight and why the tavern-keeper's nightmare-haunted nephew saw in his dream, the Black Stone like a spire on a cyclopean black castle. If men ever excavate among those mountains they may find incredible things below those masking slopes. For the cave wherein the Turks trapped the–

thing–was not truly a cavern, and I shudder to contemplate the gigantic gulf of eons which must stretch between this age and the time when the earth shook herself and reared up, like a wave, those blue mountains that, rising, enveloped unthinkable things. May no man ever seek to uproot that ghastly spire men call the Black Stone!

A Key! Aye, it is a Key, symbol of a forgotten horror. That horror has faded into the limbo from which it crawled, loathsomely, in the black dawn of the earth. But what of the other fiendish possibilities hinted at by Von Junzt–what of the monstrous hand which strangled out his life? Since reading what Selim Bahadur wrote, I can no longer doubt anything in the Black Book. Man was not always master of the earth–and is he now?

And the thought recurs to me–if such a monstrous entity as the Master of the Monolith somehow survived its own unspeakably distant epoch so long– *what nameless shapes may even now lurk in the dark places of the world?*

The Thing on the Roof

They lumber through the night

With their elephantine tread;

I shudder in affright

As I cower in my bed.

They lift colossal wings

On the high gable roofs

Which tremble to the trample

Of their mastodonic hoofs.

–*Justin Geoffrey*, Out of the Old Land

Let me begin by saying that I was surprized when Tussmann called on me. We had never been close friends; the man's mercenary instincts repelled me; and since our bitter controversy of three years before, when he attempted to discredit my *Evidences of Nahua Culture in Yucatan*, which was the result of years of careful research, our relations had been anything but cordial. However, I received him and found his manner hasty and abrupt, but rather abstracted, as if his dislike for me had been thrust aside in some driving passion that had hold of him.

His errand was quickly stated. He wished my aid in obtaining a volume in the first edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*–the edition known as the Black Book, not from its color, but because of its dark contents. He might almost as well have asked me for the original Greek translation of the *Necronomicon*.

Though since my return from Yucatan I had devoted practically all my time to my avocation of book collecting, I had not stumbled on to any hint that the book in the Düsseldorf edition was still in existence.

A word as to this rare work. Its extreme ambiguity in spots, coupled with its incredible subject matter, has caused it long to be regarded as the ravings of a maniac and the author was damned with the brand of insanity. But the fact remains that much of his assertions are unanswerable, and that he spent the full forty-five years of his life prying into strange places and discovering secret and abysmal things. Not a great many volumes were printed in the first edition and many of these were burned by their frightened owners when Von Junzt was found strangled in a mysterious manner, in his barred and bolted chamber one night in 1840, six months after he had returned from a mysterious journey to Mongolia.

Five years later a London printer, one Bridewall, pirated the work, and issued a cheap translation for sensational effect, full of grotesque wood-cuts, and riddled with misspellings, faulty translations and the usual errors of a cheap and unscholarly printing. This still further discredited the original work, and publishers and public forgot about the book until 1909 when the Golden Goblin Press of New York brought out an edition.

Their production was so carefully expurgated that fully a fourth of the original matter was cut out; the book was handsomely bound and decorated with the exquisite and weirdly imaginative illustrations of Diego Vasquez. The edition was intended for popular consumption but the artistic instinct of the publishers defeated that end, since the cost of issuing the book was so great that they were forced to cite it at a prohibitive price.

I was explaining all this to Tussmann when he interrupted brusquely to say that he was not utterly ignorant in such matters. One of the Golden Goblin books ornamented his library, he said, and it was in it that he found a certain line which aroused his interest. If I could procure him a copy of the original 1839 edition, he would make it worth my while; knowing, he added, that it would be useless to offer me money, he would, instead, in return for my trouble in his behalf, make a full retraction of his former accusations in regard to my Yucatan researches, and offer a complete apology in *The Scientific News*.

I will admit that I was astounded at this, and realized that if the matter meant so much to Tussmann that he was willing to make such concessions, it must indeed be of the utmost importance. I answered that I considered that I had sufficiently refuted his charges in the eyes of the world and had no desire to put him in a humiliating position, but that I would make the utmost efforts to procure him what he wanted.

He thanked me abruptly and took his leave, saying rather vaguely that he hoped to find a complete exposition of something in the Black Book which had evidently been slighted in the later edition.

I set to work, writing letters to friends, colleagues and book-dealers all over the world, and soon discovered that I had assumed a task of no small magnitude. Three months elapsed before my efforts were crowned with success, but at last, through the aid of Professor James Clement of Richmond, Virginia, I was able to obtain what I wished.

I notified Tussmann and he came to London by the next train. His eyes burned avidly as he gazed at the thick, dusty volume with its heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps, and his fingers quivered with eagerness as he thumbed the time-yellowed pages.

And when he cried out fiercely and smashed his clenched fist down on the table I knew that he had found what he hunted.

“Listen!” he commanded, and he read to me a passage that spoke of an old, old temple in a Honduras jungle where a strange god was worshipped by an ancient tribe which became extinct before the coming of the Spaniards. And Tussmann read aloud of the mummy that had been, in life, the last high priest of that vanished people, and which now lay in a chamber hewn in the solid rock of the cliff against which the temple was built. About that mummy’s withered neck was a copper chain, and on that chain a great red jewel carved in the form of a toad. This jewel was a key, Von Junzt went on to say, to the treasure of the temple which lay hidden in a subterranean crypt far below the temple’s altar.

Tussmann’s eyes blazed.

“I have seen that temple! I have stood before the altar. I have seen the sealed-up entrance of the chamber in which, the natives say, lies the mummy of the priest. It is a very curious temple, no more like the ruins of the prehistoric Indians than it is like the buildings of the modern Latin-Americans. The Indians in the vicinity disclaim any former connection with the place; they say that the people who built that temple were a different race from themselves, and were there when their own ancestors came into the country. I believe it to be a remnant of some long-vanished civilization which began to decay thousands of years before the Spaniards came.

“I would have liked to have broken into the sealed-up chamber, but I had neither the time nor the tools for the task. I was hurrying to the coast, having been wounded by an accidental gunshot in the foot, and I stumbled on to the place purely by chance.

“I have been planning to have another look at it, but circumstances have prevented–now I intend to let nothing stand in my way! By chance I came upon a passage in the Golden Goblin edition of this book, describing the temple. But that was all; the mummy was only briefly mentioned. Interested, I obtained one of Bridewall’s translations but ran up against a blank wall of baffling blunders. By some irritating mischance the translator had even mistaken the location of the Temple of the Toad, as Von Junzt calls

it, and has it in Guatemala instead of Honduras. The general description is faulty, but the jewel is mentioned and the fact that it is a ‘key.’ But a key to what, Bridewall’s book does not state. I now felt that I was on the track of a real discovery, unless Von Junzt was, as many maintain, a madman. But that the man was actually in Honduras at one time is well attested, and no one could so vividly describe the temple–as he does in the Black Book–unless he had seen it himself. How he learned of the jewel is more than I can say. The Indians who told me of the mummy said nothing of any jewel. I can only believe that Von Junzt found his way into the sealed crypt somehow–the man had uncanny ways of learning hidden things.

“To the best of my knowledge only one other white man has seen the Temple of the Toad besides Von Junzt and myself–the Spanish traveller Juan Gonzalles, who made a partial exploration of that country in 1793. He mentioned, briefly, a curious fane that differed from most Indian ruins, and spoke skeptically of a legend current among the natives that there was ‘something unusual’ hidden under the temple. I feel certain that he was referring to the Temple of the Toad.

“Tomorrow I sail for Central America. Keep the book; I have no more use for it. This time I am going fully prepared and I intend to find what is hidden in that temple, if I have to demolish it. It can be nothing less than a great store of gold! The Spaniards missed it, somehow; when they arrived in Central America, the Temple of the Toad was deserted; they were searching for living Indians from whom torture could wring gold; not for mummies of lost peoples. But I mean to have that treasure.”

So saying Tussman took his departure. I sat down and opened the book at the place where he had left off reading, and I sat until midnight, wrapt in Von Junzt’s curious, wild and at times utterly vague expoundings. And I found pertaining to the Temple of the Toad certain things which disquieted me so much that the next morning I attempted to get in touch with Tussmann, only to find that he had already sailed.

Several months passed and then I received a letter from Tussmann, asking me to come and spend a few days with him at his estate in Sussex; he also requested me to bring the Black Book with me.

I arrived at Tussmann's rather isolated estate just after nightfall. He lived in almost feudal state, his great ivy-grown house and broad lawns surrounded by high stone walls. As I went up the hedge-bordered way from the gate to the house, I noted that the place had not been well kept in its master's absence.

Weeds grew rank among the trees, almost choking out the grass. Among some unkempt bushes over against the outer wall, I heard what appeared to be a horse or an ox blundering and lumbering about. I distinctly heard the clink of its hoof on a stone.

A servant who eyed me suspiciously admitted me and I found Tussmann pacing to and fro in his study like a caged lion. His giant frame was leaner, harder than when I had last seen him; his face was bronzed by a tropic sun. There were more and harsher lines in his strong face and his eyes burned more intensely than ever. A smoldering, baffled anger seemed to underlie his manner.

"Well, Tussmann," I greeted him, "what success? Did you find the gold?"

"I found not an ounce of gold," he growled. "The whole thing was a hoax–well, not all of it. I broke into the sealed chamber and found the mummy–"

"And the jewel?" I exclaimed.

He drew something from his pocket and handed it to me.

I gazed curiously at the thing I held. It was a great jewel, clear and transparent as crystal, but of a sinister crimson, carved, as Von Junzt had declared, in the shape of a toad. I shuddered involuntarily; the image was peculiarly repulsive. I turned my attention to the heavy and curiously wrought copper chain which supported it.

"What are these characters carved on the chain?" I asked curiously.

"I can not say," Tussmann replied. "I had thought perhaps you might know. I find a faint resemblance between them and certain partly defaced

hieroglyphics on a monolith known as the Black Stone in the mountains of Hungary. I have been unable to decipher them."

"Tell me of your trip," I urged, and over our whiskey-and-sodas he began, as if with a strange reluctance.

"I found the temple again with no great difficulty, though it lies in a lonely and little-frequented region. The temple is built against a sheer stone cliff in a deserted valley unknown to maps and explorers. I would not endeavor to make an estimate of its antiquity, but it is built of a sort of unusually hard basalt, such as I have never seen anywhere else, and its extreme weathering suggests incredible age.

"Most of the columns which form its facade are in ruins, thrusting up shattered stumps from worn bases, like the scattered and broken teeth of some grinning hag. The outer walls are crumbling, but the inner walls and the columns which support such of the roof as remains intact, seem good for another thousand years, as well as the walls of the inner chamber.

"The main chamber is a large circular affair with a floor composed of great squares of stone. In the center stands the altar, merely a huge, round, curiously carved block of the same material. Directly behind the altar, in the solid stone cliff which forms the rear wall of the chamber, is the sealed and hewn-out chamber wherein lay the mummy of the temple's last priest.

"I broke into the crypt with not too much difficulty and found the mummy exactly as is stated in the Black Book. Though it was in a remarkable state of preservation, I was unable to classify it. The withered features and general contour of the skull suggested certain degraded and mongrel peoples of lower Egypt, and I feel certain that the priest was a member of a race more akin to the Caucasian than the Indian. Beyond this, I can not make any positive statement.

"But the jewel was there, the chain looped about the dried-up neck."

From this point Tussmann's narrative became so vague that I had some difficulty in following him and wondered if the tropic sun had affected his mind. He had opened a hidden door in the altar somehow with the jewel–

just how, he did not plainly say, and it struck me that he did not clearly understand himself the action of the jewel-key. But the opening of the secret door had had a bad effect on the hardy rogues in his employ. They had refused point-blank to follow him through that gaping black opening which had appeared so mysteriously when the gem was touched to the altar.

Tussmann entered alone with his pistol and electric torch, finding a narrow stone stair that wound down into the bowels of the earth, apparently. He followed this and presently came into a broad corridor, in the blackness of which his tiny beam of light was almost engulfed. As he told this he spoke with strange annoyance of a toad which hopped ahead of him, just beyond the circle of light, all the time he was below ground.

Making his way along dank tunnels and stairways that were wells of solid blackness, he at last came to a heavy door fantastically carved, which he felt must be the crypt wherein was secreted the gold of the ancient worshippers. He pressed the toad-jewel against it at several places and finally the door gaped wide.

“And the treasure?” I broke in eagerly.

He laughed in savage self-mockery.

“There was no gold there, no precious gems–nothing”–he hesitated–“nothing that I could bring away.”

Again his tale lapsed into vagueness. I gathered that he had left the temple rather hurriedly without searching any further for the supposed treasure. He had intended bringing the mummy away with him, he said, to present to some museum, but when he came up out of the pits, it could not be found and he believed that his men, in superstitious aversion to having such a companion on their road to the coast, had thrown it into some well or cavern.

“And so,” he concluded, “I am in England again no richer than when I left.”

“You have the jewel,” I reminded him. “Surely it is valuable.”

He eyed it without favor, but with a sort of fierce avidness almost obsessional.

“Would you say that it is a ruby?” he asked.

I shook my head. “I am unable to classify it.”

“And I. But let me see the book.”

He slowly turned the heavy pages, his lips moving as he read. Sometimes he shook his head as if puzzled, and I noticed him dwell long over a certain line.

“This man dipped so deeply into forbidden things,” said he, “I can not wonder that his fate was so strange and mysterious. He must have had some foreboding of his end–here he warns men not to disturb sleeping things.”

Tussmann seemed lost in thought for some moments.

“Aye, sleeping things,” he muttered, “that seem dead, but only lie waiting for some blind fool to awake them–I should have read further in the Black Book–and I should have shut the door when I left the crypt–but I have the key and I’ll keep it in spite of hell.”

He roused himself from his reveries and was about to speak when he stopped short. From somewhere upstairs had come a peculiar sound.

“What was that?” He glared at me. I shook my head and he ran to the door and shouted for a servant.

The man entered a few moments later and he was rather pale.

“You were upstairs?” growled Tussmann.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you hear anything?” asked Tussmann harshly and in a manner almost threatening and accusing.

“I did, sir,” the man answered with a puzzled look on his face.

“What did you hear?” The question was fairly snarled.

“Well, sir,” the man laughed apologetically, “you’ll say I’m a bit off, I fear, but to tell you the truth, sir, it sounded like a horse stamping around on the roof!”

A blaze of absolute madness leaped into Tussmann’s eyes.

“You fool!” he screamed. “Get out of here!” The man shrank back in amazement and Tussmann snatched up the gleaming toad-carved jewel.

“I’ve been a fool!” he raved. “I didn’t read far enough–and I should have shut the door–but by heaven, the key is mine and I’ll keep it in spite of man or devil.”

And with these strange words he turned and fled upstairs. A moment later his door slammed heavily and a servant, knocking timidly, brought forth only a blasphemous order to retire and a luridly worded threat to shoot any one who tried to obtain entrance into the room.

Had it not been so late I would have left the house, for I was certain that Tussmann was stark mad. As it was, I retired to the room a frightened servant showed me, but I did not go to bed. I opened the pages of the Black Book at the place where Tussmann had been reading.

This much was evident, unless the man was utterly insane: he had stumbled upon something unexpected in the Temple of the Toad. Something unnatural about the opening of the altar door had frightened his men, and in the subterraneous crypt Tussmann had found *something* that he had not thought to find. And I believed that he had been followed from Central America, and that the reason for his persecution was the jewel he called the Key.

Seeking some clue in Von Junzt’s volume, I read again of the Temple of the Toad, of the strange pre-Indian people who worshipped there, and of the huge, tittering, tentacled, hoofed monstrosity that they worshipped.

Tussmann had said that he had not read far enough when he had first seen the book. Puzzling over this cryptic phrase I came upon the line he had pored over–marked by his thumb nail. It seemed to me to be another of Von Junzt's many ambiguities, for it merely stated that a temple's god was the temple's treasure. Then the dark implication of the hint struck me and cold sweat beaded my forehead.

The Key to the Treasure! And the temple's treasure was the temple's god! And sleeping Things might awaken on the opening of their prison door! I sprang up, unnerved by the intolerable suggestion, and at that moment something crashed in the stillness and the death-scream of a human being burst upon my ears.

In an instant I was out of the room, and as I dashed up the stairs I heard sounds that have made me doubt my sanity ever since. At Tussmann's door I halted, essaying with shaking hand to turn the knob.

The door was locked, and as I hesitated I heard from within a hideous high-pitched tittering and then the disgusting squashy sound as if a great, jelly-like bulk was being forced through the window. The sound ceased and I could have sworn I heard a faint swish of gigantic wings. Then silence.

Gathering my shattered nerves, I broke down the door. A foul and overpowering stench billowed out like a yellow mist. Gasping in nausea I entered. The room was in ruins, but nothing was missing except that crimson toad-carved jewel Tussmann called the Key, and that was never found. A foul, unspeakable slime smeared the window-sill, and in the center of the room lay Tussmann, his head crushed and flattened; and on the red ruin of skull and face, the plain print of an enormous hoof.

The Dweller in Dark Valley

The nightwinds tossed the tangled trees, the stars were cold with scorn;
Midnight lay over Dark Valley the hour I was born.

The mid-wife dozed beside the hearth, a hand the window tried–

She woke and stared and screamed and swooned at what she saw outside.

Her hair was white as a leper’s hand, she never spoke again;

But laughed and wove the wild flowers into an endless chain.

But when my childish tongue could speak, and my infant feet could stray, I found her dying in the hills at the haunted dusk of day.

And her darkening eyes at last were sane; she passed with a fearsome word:

“You who were born in Dark Valley, beware the Valley’s lord!”

As I came down through Dark Valley, the grim hills gulped the light; I heard the ponderous tramping of a monster in the night.

The great trees leaned together, the vines ensnared my feet,

I heard across the darkness my own heart’s thundering beat.

Damned be the dark ends of the earth where old horrors live again.

And monsters of lost ages lurk to eat the souls of men!

I climbed the ridge into the moon and trembling there I turned–

Down in the blasted shadows two eyes like hellfire burned.

Under the black malignant trees a shapeless Shadow fell–

I go no more to Dark Valley which is the Gate of Hell.

The Horror from the Mound

Steve Brill did not believe in ghosts or demons. Juan Lopez did. But neither the caution of the one nor the sturdy skepticism of the other was shield against the horror that fell upon them–the horror forgotten by men for more than three hundred years–a screaming fear monstrously resurrected from the black lost ages.

Yet as Steve Brill sat on his sagging stoop that last evening, his thoughts were as far from uncanny menaces as the thoughts of man can be. His ruminations were bitter but materialistic. He surveyed his farmland and he swore. Brill was tall, rangy and tough as boot-leather–true son of the iron-bodied pioneers who wrenched West Texas from the wilderness. He was browned by the sun and strong as a longhorn steer. His lean legs and the boots on them reflected his cowboy habits and instincts, and now he cursed himself that he had ever climbed off the hurricane deck of his crank-eyed mustang and turned to farming. He was no farmer, the young puncher admitted profanely.

Yet his failure had not all been his fault. Plentiful rain in the winter–rare enough in West Texas–had given promise of good crops. But as usual, things had happened. A late blizzard had destroyed all the budding fruit. The grain which had looked so promising was ripped to shreds and battered into the ground by terrific hailstorms just as it was turning yellow. A period of intense dryness, followed by another hailstorm, finished the corn.

Then the cotton, which had somehow struggled through, fell before a swarm of grasshoppers which stripped Brill's field almost over night. So Brill sat and swore that he would not renew his lease–he gave fervent thanks that he did not own the land on which he had wasted his sweat, and that there were still broad rolling ranges to the west where a strong young man could make his living riding and roping.

Now as Brill sat glumly, he was aware of the approaching form of his nearest neighbor, Juan Lopez, a taciturn old Mexican who lived in a hut just out of sight over the hill across the creek and grubbed for a living. At present he was clearing a strip of land on an adjoining farm, and in returning to his hut he crossed a corner of Brill's pasture.

Brill idly watched him climb through the barbed wire fence and trudge along the path he had worn in the short dry grass. He had been working at his present job for over a month now, chopping down tough gnarly mesquite trees and digging up their incredibly long roots, and Brill knew that he always followed the same path home. And watching, Brill noted him swerving far aside, seemingly to avoid a low rounded hillock which jutted above the level of the pasture. Lopez went far around this knoll and Brill

remembered that the old Mexican always circled it at a distance. And another thing came into Brill's idle mind–Lopez always increased his gait when he was passing the knoll, and he always managed to get by it before sundown–yet Mexican laborers generally worked from the first light of dawn to the last glint of twilight, especially at these grubbing jobs, when they were paid by the acre and not by the day. Brill's curiosity was aroused.

He rose, and sauntering down the slight slope on the crown of which his shack sat, hailed the plodding Mexican.

"Hey, Lopez, wait a minute."

Lopez halted, looked about, and remained motionless but unenthusiastic as the white man approached.

"Lopez," said Brill lazily, "it ain't none of my business, but I just wanted to ask you–how come you always go so far around that old Indian mound?"

"*No sabe*," grunted Lopez shortly.

"You're a liar," responded Brill genially. "You savvy all right; you speak English as good as me. What's the matter–you think that mound's ha'nted or somethin'?"

Brill could speak Spanish himself, and read it, too, but like most Anglo-Saxons he much preferred to speak his own language.

Lopez shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not a good place, *no bueno?* " he muttered, avoiding Brill's eye. "Let hidden things rest."

"I reckon you're scared of ghosts," Brill bantered. "Shucks, if that is an Indian mound, them Indians been dead so long their ghosts 'ud be wore plumb out by now."

Brill knew that the illiterate Mexicans looked with superstitious aversion on the mounds that are found here and there through the Southwest–relics of a

past and forgotten age, containing the moldering bones of chiefs and warriors of a lost race.

“Best not to disturb what is hidden in the earth,” grunted Lopez.

“Bosh,” said Brill. “Me and some boys busted into one of them mounds over in the Palo Pinto country and dug up pieces of a skeleton with some beads and flint arrowheads and the like. I kept some of the teeth a long time till I lost ’em, and I ain’t never been ha’nted.”

“Indians?” snorted Lopez unexpectedly. “Who spoke of Indians? There have been more than Indians in this country. In the old times strange things happened here. I have heard the tales of my people, handed down from generation to generation. And my people were here long before yours, *Señor* Brill.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” admitted Steve. “First white men in this country was Spaniards, of course.

Coronado passed along not very far from here, I hear tell, and Hernando de Estrada’s expedition came through here–away back yonder–I dunno how long ago.”

“In 1545,” said Lopez. “They pitched camp yonder where your corral now stands.”

Brill turned to glance at his rail-fenced corral, inhabited now by his saddle pony, a pair of work horses and a scrawny cow.

“How come you know so much about it?” he asked curiously.

“One of my ancestors marched with de Estrada,” answered Lopez. “A soldier, Porfirio Lopez; he told his son of that expedition, and he told *his* son, and so down the family line to me, who have no son to whom I can tell the tale.”

“I didn’t know you were so well connected,” said Brill. “Maybe you know somethin’ about the gold de Estrada was supposed to hid around here

somewhere."

"There was no gold," growled Lopez. "De Estrada's soldiers bore only their arms, and they fought their way through hostile country–many left their bones along the trail. Later–many years later–a mule train from Santa Fe was attacked not many miles from here by Comanches and they hid their gold and escaped; so the legends got mixed up. But even their gold is not there now, because Gringo buffalo-hunters found it and dug it up."

Brill nodded abstractedly, hardly heeding. Of all the continent of North America there is no section so haunted by tales of lost or hidden treasure as is the Southwest. Uncounted wealth passed back and forth over the hills and plains of Texas and New Mexico in the old days when Spain owned the gold and silver mines of the New World and controlled the rich fur trade of the West, and echoes of that wealth linger on in tales of golden caches. Some such vagrant dream, born of failure and pressing poverty, rose in Brill's mind.

Aloud he spoke: "Well, anyway, I got nothin' else to do, and I believe I'll dig into that old mound and see what I can find."

The effect of that simple statement on Lopez was nothing short of shocking. He recoiled and his swarthy brown face went ashy; his black eyes flared and he threw up his arms in a gesture of intense expostulation.

"*Dios, no!* " he cried. "Don't do that, *Señor* Brill! There is a curse–my grandfather told me–"

"Told you what?" asked Brill, as Lopez halted suddenly.

Lopez lapsed into sullen silence.

"I can not speak," he muttered. "I am sworn to silence. Only to an eldest son could I open my heart. But believe me when I say better had you cut your throat than to break into that accursed mound."

"Well," said Brill, impatient of Mexican superstitions, "if it's so bad, why don't you gimme a logical reason for not bustin' into it?"

“I can not speak!” cried the Mexican desperately. “I *know*–but I swore to silence on the Holy Crucifix, just as every man of my family has sworn. It is a thing so dark, it is to risk damnation even to speak of it!

Were I to tell you, I would blast the soul from your body. But I have sworn–and I have no son, so my lips are sealed for ever.”

“Aw well,” said Brill sarcastically, “why don’t you write it out?”

Lopez started, stared, and to Steve’s surprize, caught at the suggestion.

“I will! *Dios* be thanked the good priest taught me to write when I was a child. My oath said nothing of writing. I only swore not to speak. I will write out the whole thing for you, if you will swear not to speak of it afterward, and to destroy the paper as soon as you have read it.”

“Sure,” said Brill, to humor him, and the old Mexican seemed much relieved.

“*Bueno!* I will go at once and write. Tomorrow as I go to work I will bring you the writing and you will understand why no one must open that accursed mound!”

OceanofPDF.com

And Lopez hurried along his homeward path, his stooped shoulders swaying with the effort of his unwonted haste. Steve grinned after him, shrugged his shoulders and turned back toward his own shack.

Then he halted, gazing back at the low rounded mound with its grass-grown sides. It must be an Indian tomb, he decided, what of its symmetry and its similarity to other Indian mounds he had seen. He scowled as he tried to figure out the seeming connection between the mysterious knoll and the martial ancestor of Juan Lopez.

Brill gazed after the receding figure of the old Mexican. A shallow valley, cut by a half-dry creek, bordered with trees and underbrush, lay between Brill's pasture and the low sloping hill beyond which lay Lopez's shack. Among the trees along the creek bank the old Mexican was disappearing. And Brill came to a sudden decision.

Hurrying up the slight slope, he took a pick and a shovel from the tool shed built on to the back of his shack. The sun had not yet set and Brill believed he could open the mound deep enough to determine its nature by lantern-light. Steve, like most of his breed, lived mostly by impulse, and his present urge was to tear into that mysterious hillock and find what, if anything, was concealed therein. The thought of treasure came again to his mind, piqued by the evasive attitude of Lopez.

What if, after all, that grassy heap of brown earth hid riches–virgin ore from forgotten mines, or the minted coinage of old Spain? Was it not possible that the musketeers of de Estrada had themselves reared that pile above a treasure they could not bear away, molding it in the likeness of an Indian mound to befool seekers? Did old Lopez know that? It would not be strange if, knowing of treasure there, the old Mexican refrained from disturbing it. Ridden with grisly superstitious fears, he might well live out a life of barren toil rather than risk the wrath of lurking ghosts or devils–for the Mexicans say that hidden gold is always accursed, and surely there was supposed to be some especial doom resting on this mound.

Well, Brill meditated, Latin-Indian devils had no terrors for the Anglo-Saxon, tormented by the demons of drouth and storm and crop failure.

Steve set to work with the savage energy characteristic of his breed. The task was no light one; the soil, baked by the fierce sun, was iron-hard, and mixed with rocks and pebbles. Brill sweated profusely and grunted with his efforts, but the fire of the treasure hunter was on him. He shook the sweat out of his eyes and drove in the pick with mighty strokes that ripped and crumbled the close-packed dirt.

The sun went down, and in the long dreamy summer twilight he worked on, oblivious to time or space.

He began to be convinced that the mound was a genuine Indian tomb, as he found traces of charcoal in the soil. The ancient people which reared these sepulchers had kept fire burning upon them for days, at some point in the building. All the mounds Steve had ever opened had contained a solid stratum of charcoal a short distance below the surface. But the charcoal traces he found now were scattered about through the soil.

His idea of a Spanish-built treasure trove faded, but he persisted. Who knows? Perhaps that strange folk men now call Mound-Builders had treasure of their own which they laid away with the dead.

Then Steve yelped in exultation as his pick rang on a bit of metal. He snatched it up and held it close to his eyes, straining in the waning light. It was caked and corroded with rust, worn almost paper thin, but he knew it for what it was–a spur rowel, unmistakably Spanish with its long cruel points. And he halted, completely bewildered. No Spaniard ever reared this mound, with its undeniable marks of aboriginal workmanship. Yet how came that relic of Spanish caballeros hidden deep in the packed soil?

Brill shook his head and set to work again. He knew that in the center of the mound, if it were indeed an aboriginal tomb, he would find a narrow chamber built of heavy stones, containing the bones of the chief for which the mound had been reared and the victims sacrificed above it. And in the gathering darkness he felt his pick strike heavily against something granite-like and unyielding. Examination, by sense of feel as well as by sight, proved it to be a solid block of stone, roughly hewn. Doubtless it formed one of the ends of the death-chamber. Useless to try to shatter it. Brill chipped and pecked about it, scraping the dirt and pebbles away from the

corners until he felt that wrenching it out would be but a matter of sinking the pick-point underneath and levering it out.

But now he was suddenly aware that darkness had come on. In the young moon objects were dim and shadowy. His mustang nickered in the corral whence came the comfortable crunch of tired beasts' jaws on corn. A whippoorwill called eerily from the dark shadows of the narrow winding creek. Brill straightened reluctantly. Better get a lantern before continuing his explorations.

He felt in his pocket with some idea of wrenching out the stone and exploring the cavity with the aid of matches. Then he stiffened. Was it imagination that he heard a faint sinister rustling, which seemed to come from behind the blocking stone? Snakes! Doubtless they had holes somewhere about the base of the mound and there might be a dozen big diamond-backed rattlers coiled up in that cave-like interior waiting for him to put his hand among them. He shivered slightly at the thought and backed away out of the excavation he had made.

It wouldn't do to go poking about blindly into holes. And for the past few minutes, he realized, he had been aware of a faint foul odor exuding from interstices about the blocking stone–though he admitted that the smell suggested reptiles no more than it did any other menacing scent. It had a charnel-house reek about it–gases formed in the chamber of death, no doubt, and dangerous to the living.

Steve laid down his pick and returned to the house, impatient of the necessary delay. Entering the dark building, he struck a match and located his kerosene lantern hanging on its nail on the wall. Shaking it, he satisfied himself that it was nearly full of coal oil, and lighted it. Then he fared forth again, for his eagerness would not allow him to pause long enough for a bite of food. The mere opening of the mound intrigued him, as it must always intrigue a man of imagination, and the discovery of the Spanish spur had whetted his curiosity.

He hurried from his shack, the swinging lantern casting long distorted shadows ahead of him and behind.

He chuckled as he visualized Lopez's actions when he learned, on the morrow, that the forbidden mound had been pried into. A good thing he had opened it that evening, Brill reflected; Lopez might even have tried to prevent him meddling with it, had he known.

In the dreamy hush of the summer night, Brill reached the mound–lifted his lantern–swore bewilderedly.

The lantern revealed his excavations, his tools lying carelessly where he had dropped them–and a black gaping aperture! The great blocking stone lay in the bottom of the excavation, as if thrust carelessly aside.

Warily he thrust the lantern forward and peered into the small cave-like chamber, expecting to see he knew not what. Nothing met his eyes except the bare rock sides of a long narrow cell, large enough to receive a man's body, which had apparently been built up of roughly hewn square-cut stones, cunningly joined together.

"Lopez!" exclaimed Steve furiously. "The dirty coyote! He's been watchin' me work–and when I went after the lantern, he snuck up and pried the rock out–and grabbed whatever was in there, I reckon. Blast his greasy hide, I'll fix him!"

Savagely he extinguished the lantern and glared across the shallow, brush-grown valley. And as he looked he stiffened. Over the corner of the hill, on the other side of which stood the shack of Lopez, a shadow moved. The slender moon was setting, the light dim and the play of the shadows baffling. But Steve's eyes were sharpened by the sun and winds of the wastelands, and he knew that it was some two-legged creature that was disappearing over the low shoulder of the mesquite-grown hill.

"Beatin' it to his shack," snarled Brill. "He's shore got somethin' or he wouldn't be travelin' at that speed."

Brill swallowed, wondering why a peculiar trembling had suddenly taken hold of him. What was there unusual about a thieving old greaser running home with his loot? Brill tried to drown the feeling that there was something peculiar about the gait of the dim shadow, which had seemed to

move at a sort of slinking lope. There must have been need for swiftness when stocky old Juan Lopez elected to travel at such a strange pace.

“Whatever he found is as much mine as his,” swore Brill, trying to get his mind off the abnormal aspect of the figure’s flight. “I got this land leased, and I done all the work diggin’. A curse, hell! No wonder he told me that stuff. Wanted me to leave it alone so he could get it hisself. It’s a wonder he ain’t dug it up long before this. But you can’t never tell about them spigs.”

Brill, as he meditated thus, was striding down the gentle slope of the pasture which led down to the creek-bed. He passed into the shadows of the trees and dense underbrush and walked across the dry creek-bed, noting absently that neither whippoorwill nor hoot-owl called in the darkness. There was a waiting, listening tenseness in the night that he did not like. The shadows in the creek bed seemed too thick, too breathless. He wished he had not blown out the lantern, which he still carried, and was glad he had brought the pick, gripped like a battle-axe in his right hand. He had an impulse to whistle, just to break the silence, then swore and dismissed the thought. Yet he was glad when he clambered up the low opposite bank and emerged into the starlight.

He walked up the slope and onto the hill, and looked down on the mesquite flat wherein stood Lopez’s squalid hut. A light showed at the one window.

“Packin’ his things for a getaway, I reckon,” grunted Steve. “Ow, what the–”

He staggered as from a physical impact as a frightful scream knifed the stillness. He wanted to clap his hands over his ears to shut out the horror of that cry, which rose unbearably and then broke in an abhorrent gurgle.

“Good God!” Cold sweat sprung out on Steve. “Lopez–or somebody–”

Even as he gasped the words he was running down the hill as fast as his long legs could carry him. Some unspeakable horror was taking place in that lonely hut, but he was going to investigate if it meant facing the Devil himself. He gripped his pick-handle as he ran. Wandering prowlers, murdering old Lopez for the loot he had taken from the mound, Steve

thought, and forgot his wrath. It would go hard for anyone he caught molesting the old scoundrel, thief though he might be.

He hit the flat, running hard. And then the light in the hut went out and Steve staggered in full flight, bringing up against a mesquite tree with an impact that jolted a grunt out of him and tore his hands on the thorns. Rebounding with a sobbed curse, he rushed for the shack, nerving himself for what he might see–his hair still standing on end at what he had already seen.

Brill tried the one door of the hut and found it bolted within. He shouted to Lopez and received no answer. Yet utter silence did not reign. From within came a curious muffled worrying sound, that ceased as Brill swung his pick crashing against the door. The flimsy portal splintered and Brill leaped into the dark hut, eyes blazing, pick swung high for a desperate onslaught. But no sound ruffled the grisly silence, and in the darkness nothing stirred, though Brill's chaotic imagination peopled the shadowed corners of the hut with shapes of horror.

With a hand damp with perspiration he found a match and struck it. Besides himself only old Lopez occupied the hut–old Lopez, stark dead on the dirt floor, arms spread wide like a crucifix, mouth sagging open in a semblance of idiocy, eyes wide and staring with a horror Brill found intolerable. The one window gaped open, showing the method of the slayer's exit–possibly his entrance as well. Brill went to that window and gazed out warily. He saw only the sloping hillside on one hand and the mesquite flat on the other. He started–was that a hint of movement among the stunted shadows of the mesquites and chaparral–or had he but imagined he glimpsed a dim loping figure among the trees?

He turned back, as the match burned down to his fingers. He lit the old coal oil lamp on the rude table, cursing as he burned his hand. The globe of the lamp was very hot, as if it had been burning for hours.

Reluctantly he turned to the corpse on the floor. Whatever sort of death had come to Lopez, it had been horrible, but Brill, gingerly examining the dead man, found no wound–no mark of knife or bludgeon on him. Wait! There was a thin smear of blood on Brill's questing fingers. Searching, he found

the source–three or four tiny punctures in Lopez's throat, from which blood had oozed sluggishly. At first he thought they had been inflicted with a stiletto–a thin round edgeless dagger. He had seen stiletto wounds–he had the scar of one on his own body. These wounds more resembled the bite of some animal–they looked like the marks of pointed fangs.

Yet Brill did not believe they were deep enough to have caused death, nor had much blood flowed from them. A belief, abhorrent with grisly potentialities, rose up in the dark corners of his mind–that Lopez had died of fright, and that the wounds had been inflicted either simultaneously with his death, or an instant afterward.

And Steve noticed something else; scattered about on the floor lay a number of dingy leaves of paper, scrawled in the old Mexican's crude hand–he would write of the curse on the mound, he had said. There were the sheets on which he had written, there was the stump of a pencil on the floor, there was the hot lamp globe, all mute witnesses that the old Mexican had been seated at the rough-hewn table writing for hours. Then it was not he who opened the mound-chamber and stole the contents–but who was it, in God's name? And who or what was it that Brill had glimpsed loping over the shoulder of the hill?

Well, there was but one thing to do–saddle his mustang and ride the ten miles to Coyote Wells, the nearest town, and inform the sheriff of the murder.

Brill gathered up the papers. The last was crumpled in the old man's clutching hand and Brill secured it with some difficulty. Then as he turned to extinguish the light, he hesitated, and cursed himself for the crawling fear that lurked at the back of his mind–fear of the shadowy thing he had seen cross the window just before the light went out in the hut. The long arm of the murderer, he thought, reaching to extinguish the lamp, no doubt. What had there been abnormal or inhuman about the vision, distorted though it must have been in the dim lamplight and shadow? As a man strives to remember the details of a nightmare dream, Steve tried to define in his mind some clear reason that would explain why that flying glimpse had unnerved him to the extent of blundering headlong into a tree, and why the mere vague remembrance of it now caused cold sweat to break out on him.

Cursing himself to keep up his courage, he lighted his lantern, blew out the lamp on the rough table, and resolutely set forth, grasping his pick like a weapon. After all, why should certain seemingly abnormal aspects about a sordid murder upset him? Such crimes were revolting, but common enough, especially among Mexicans, who cherished unguessed feuds.

Then as he stepped into the silent star-flecked night he brought up short. From across the creek sounded the sudden soul-shaking scream of a horse in deadly terror–then a mad drumming of hoofs that receded in the distance. Brill swore in rage and dismay. Was it a panther lurking in the hills–had a monstrous cat slain old Lopez? Then why was not the victim marked with the scars of fierce hooked talons? *And who extinguished the light in the hut?*

As he wondered, Brill was running swiftly toward the dark creek. Not lightly does a cowpuncher regard the stampeding of his stock. As he passed in to the darkness of the brush along the dry creek, Brill found his tongue strangely dry. He kept swallowing, and he held the lantern high. It made but faint impression in the gloom, but seemed to accentuate the blackness of the crowding shadows. For some strange reason the thought entered Brill's chaotic mind that though the land was new to the Anglo-Saxon, it was in reality very old. That broken and desecrated tomb was mute evidence that the land was ancient to man, and suddenly the night and the hills and the shadows bore on Brill with a sense of hideous antiquity. Here had long generations of men lived and died before Brill's ancestors ever heard of the land. In the night, in the shadows of this very creek, men had no doubt given up their ghosts in grisly ways. With these reflections Brill hurried through the shadows of the thick trees.

He breathed deeply in relief when he emerged from the thickets on his own side. Hurrying up the gentle slope to the railed corral, he held up his lantern, investigating. The corral was empty; not even the placid cow was in sight. And the bars were down. That pointed to human agency, and the affair took on a newly sinister aspect. Someone did not intend that Brill should ride to Coyote Wells that night. It meant that the murderer intended making his getaway and wanted a good start on the law–or else–Brill grinned wryly. Far away across a mesquite flat he believed he could still catch the faint and

far-away noise of running horses. What in God's name had given them such a fright? A cold finger of fear played shudderingly on Brill's spine.

Steve headed for the house. He did not enter boldly. He crept clear around the shack, peering shudderingly into the dark windows, listening with painful intensity for some sound to betray the presence of the lurking killer. At last he ventured to open a door and step in. He threw the door back against the wall to find if anyone were hiding behind it, lifted the lantern high and stepped in, heart pounding, pick gripped fiercely, his feelings a mixture of fear and red rage. But no hidden assassin leaped upon him, and a wary exploration of the shack revealed nothing suspicious.

With a sigh of relief he locked the doors, made fast the windows and lighted his old coal oil lamp. The thought of old Lopez lying, a glassy-eyed corpse alone in the hut across the creek, made him wince and shiver, but he did not intend to start for town on foot in the night.

He drew from its hiding place his reliable old Colt .45, spun the blue steel cylinder and grinned mirthlessly. Maybe the killer did not intend to leave any witnesses to his crime alive. Well, let him come!

He–or they–would find a young cowpuncher with a sixshooter less easy prey than an old unarmed Mexican. And that reminded Brill of the papers he had brought from the hut. Taking care that he was not in line with a window through which a sudden bullet might come, he settled himself to read, with one ear alert for stealthy sounds.

And as he read the crude laborious script, a slow cold horror grew in his soul. It was a tale of fear the old Mexican had scrawled–a tale handed down from generation to generation–a tale of ancient times.

And Brill read of the wanderings of the caballero Hernando de Estrada and his armored pikemen, who dared the deserts of the Southwest when all was strange and unknown. There were some forty-odd soldiers, servants, and masters, at the beginning, the manuscript ran. There was the captain, de Estrada, and the priest, and young Juan Zavilla, and Don Santiago de Valdez–a mysterious nobleman who had been taken off a helplessly floating ship in the Caribbean Sea–all the others of the crew and passengers had

died of plague, he had said, and he had cast their bodies overboard. So de Estrada had taken him aboard the ship that was bearing the expedition from Spain, and he had joined them in their explorations.

Brill read something of their wanderings, told in the crude style of old Lopez, as the old Mexican's ancestors had handed down the tale for over three hundred years. The bare written words dimly reflected the terrific hardships the explorers had encountered–drouth, thirst, floods, the desert sandstorms, the spears of hostile redskins. But it was of another peril that old Lopez told–a grisly lurking horror that fell upon the lonely caravan wandering through the immensity of the wild. Man by man they fell and no man knew the slayer. Fear and black suspicion ate at the heart of the expedition like a canker, and their leader knew not where to turn. This they all knew: among them was a fiend in human form.

Men began to draw apart from each other, to scatter along the line of march, and this mutual suspicion, that sought security in solitude, played into the talons of the fiend. The skeleton of the expedition staggered through the wilderness, lost, dazed and helpless, and still the unseen horror hung on their flanks, dragging down the stragglers, preying on drowsing sentries and sleeping men. And on the throat of each was found the wounds of pointed fangs that bled the victim white; so the living knew with what manner of evil they had to deal. Men reeled through the wild, calling on the saints, or blaspheming in their terror, fighting frenziedly against sleep, until they fell with exhaustion and sleep stole on them with horror and death.

Suspicion centered on a great black man, a cannibal slave from Calabar. And they put him in chains. But young Juan Zavilla went the way of the rest, and then the priest was taken. But the priest fought off his fiendish assailant and lived long enough to gasp the demon's name to de Estrada. And Brill read:

"…And now it was evident to de Estrada that the good priest had spoken the truth, and the slayer was Don Santiago de Valdez, who was a vampire, an undead fiend, subsisting on the blood of the living. And de Estrada called to mind a certain foul nobleman who had lurked in the mountains of Castile since the days of the Moors, feeding off the blood of helpless victims which lent him a ghastly immortality. This nobleman had been driven forth; none

knew where he had fled, but it was evident that he and Don Santiago were the same man. He had fled Spain by ship, and de Estrada knew that the people of that ship had died, not by plague as the fiend had represented, but by the fangs of the vampire.

“De Estrada and the black man and the few soldiers who still lived went searching for him and found him stretched in bestial sleep in a clump of chaparral; full-gorged he was with human blood from his last victim. Now it is well known that a vampire, like a great serpent, when well gorged, falls into a deep sleep and may be taken without peril. But de Estrada was at a loss as to how to dispose of the monster, for how may the dead be slain? For a vampire is a man who has died long ago, yet is quick with a certain foul *unlife*.

“The men urged that the Caballero drive a stake through the fiend’s heart and cut off his head, uttering the holy words that would crumple the longdead body into dust, but the priest was dead and de Estrada feared that in the act the monster might awaken.

“So they lifted Don Santiago softly, and bore him to an old Indian mound near by. This they opened, taking forth the bones they found there, and they placed the vampire within and sealed up the mound–

Dios grant till Judgment Day.

“It is a place accursed, and I wish I had starved elsewhere before I came into this part of the country seeking work–for I have known of the land and the creek and the mound with its terrible secret, ever since childhood; so you see, *Señor* Brill, why you must not open the mound and wake the fiend–”

There the manuscript ended with an erratic scratch of the pencil that tore the crumpled leaf.

Brill rose, his heart pounding wildly, his face bloodless, his tongue cleaving to his palate. He gagged and found words.

“That’s why the spur was in the mound–one of them Spaniards dropped it while they was diggin’–I mighta knowed it’d been dug into before, the way the charcoal was scattered out–but, good God–”

Aghast he shrank from the black visions evoked–an undead monster stirring in the gloom of his tomb, thrusting from within to push aside the stone loosened by the pick of ignorance–a shadowy shape loping over the hill toward a light that betokened a human prey–a frightful long arm that crossed a dim-lit window….

“It’s madness!” he gasped. “Lopez was plumb loco! They ain’t no such things as vampires. If they is, why didn’t he get me first, instead of Lopez–unless he was scoutin’ around, makin’ sure of everything before he pounced? Aw, hell! It’s all a pipe-dream–”

The words froze in his throat. At the window a face glared and gibbered soundlessly at him. Two icy eyes pierced his very soul. A shriek burst from his throat and that ghastly visage vanished. But the very air was permeated by the foul scent that had hung about the ancient mound. And now the door creaked–bent slowly inward. Brill backed up against the wall, his gun shaking in his hand. It did not occur to him to fire through the door; in his chaotic brain he had but one thought–that only that thin portal of wood separated him from some horror born out of the womb of night and gloom and the black past. His eyes were distended as he saw the door give, as he heard the staples of the bolt groan.

The door burst inward. Brill did not scream. His tongue was frozen to the roof of his mouth. His fear-glazed eyes took in the tall, vulture-like form–the icy eyes, the long black finger nails–the moldering garb, hideously ancient–the long spurred boots–the slouch hat with its crumbling feather–the flowing cloak that was falling to slow shreds. Framed in the black doorway crouched that abhorrent shape out of the past, and Brill’s brain reeled. A savage coldness radiated from the figure–the scent of moldering clay and the charnel-house refuse. And then the undead came at the living like a swooping vulture.

Brill fired point-blank and saw a shred of rotten cloth fly from the Thing’s breast. The vampire reeled beneath the impact of the heavy ball, then

righted itself and came on with frightful speed. Brill reeled back against the wall with a choking cry, the gun falling from his nerveless hand. The black legends were true, then–human weapons were powerless–for may a man kill one already dead for long centuries, as mortals die?

Then the claw-like hands at his throat roused the young cowpuncher to a frenzy of madness. As his pioneer ancestors fought hand to hand against brain-shattering odds, Steve Brill fought the cold dead crawling thing that sought his life and his soul.

Of that ghastly battle Brill never remembered much. It was a blind chaos in which he screamed beast-like, tore and slugged and hammered, where long black nails like the talons of a panther tore at him, and pointed teeth snapped again and again at his throat. Rolling and tumbling about the room, both half enveloped by the musty folds of that ancient rotting cloak, they battered and smote one another among the ruins of the shattered furniture, and the fury of the vampire was not more terrible than the fear-crazed desperation of its victim.

They crashed headlong into the table, knocking it over upon its side, and the coal oil lamp splintered on the floor, spraying the walls with sudden flame. Brill felt the bite of the burning oil that splattered him, but in the red frenzy of the fight he gave no heed. The black talons were tearing at him, the inhuman eyes burning icily into his soul; between his frantic fingers the withered flesh of the monster was hard as dry wood. And wave after wave of blind madness swept over Steve Brill. Like a man battling a nightmare he screamed and smote, while all about them the fire leaped up and caught at the walls and roof.

Through darting jets and licking tongues of flame they reeled and rolled like a demon and a mortal warring on the fire-lanced floors of hell. And in the growing tumult of the flames, Brill gathered himself for one volcanic burst of effort. Breaking away and staggering up, gasping and bloody, he lunged blindly at the foul shape and caught it in a grip not even a vampire could break. And whirling his fiendish assailant on high, he dashed it down across the uptilted edge of the fallen table as a man might break a stick of wood across his knee. Something cracked like a snapping branch and the vampire fell from Brill’s grasp to writhe in a strange broken posture on the

burning floor. Yet it was not dead, for its flaming eyes still burned on Brill with a ghastly hunger, and it strove to crawl toward him with its broken spine, as a dying snake crawls.

Brill, reeling and gasping, shook the blood from his eyes, and staggered blindly through the broken door.

And as a man runs from the portals of hell, he ran stumblingly through the mesquite and chaparral until he fell from utter exhaustion. Looking back he saw the flame of the burning house cutting the night, and thanked God that it would burn until the very bones of Don Santiago de Valdez were utterly consumed and destroyed from the knowledge of men.

A Dull Sound as of Knocking

Who raps here on my door tonight,

Stirring my sleep with the deadened sound?

Here in my Room there is naught of light,

And silence locks me round.

The taste of the earth is in my mouth,

Stillness, decay and lack of light,

And dull as doom the rapping

Thuds on my Door tonight.

My Room is narrow and still and black,

In such have kings and beggars hid;

And falling clods are the knuckles

That rap on my coffin lid.

People of the Dark

I came to Dagon's Cave to kill Richard Brent. I went down the dusky avenues made by the towering trees, and my mood well-matched the primitive grimness of the scene. The approach to Dagon's Cave is always dark, for the mighty branches and thick leaves shut out the sun, and now the somberness of my own soul made the shadows seem more ominous and gloomy than was natural.

Not far away I heard the slow wash of the waves against the tall cliffs, but the sea itself was out of sight, masked by the dense oak forest. The darkness and the stark gloom of my surroundings gripped my shadowed soul as I passed beneath the ancient branches–as I came out into a narrow glade and saw the mouth of the ancient cavern before me. I paused, scanning the cavern's exterior and the dim reaches of the silent oaks.

The man I hated had not come before me! I was in time to carry out my grim intent. For a moment my resolution faltered, then like a wave there surged over me the fragrance of Eleanor Bland, a vision of wavy golden hair and deep gray eyes, changing and mystic as the sea. I clenched my hands until the knuckles showed white, and instinctively touched the wicked snub-nosed revolver whose weight sagged my coat pocket.

But for Richard Brent, I felt certain I had already won this woman, desire for whom made my waking hours a torment and my sleep a torture. Whom did she love? She would not say; I did not believe she knew. Let one of us go away, I thought, and she would turn to the other. And I was going to simplify matters for her–and for myself. By chance I had overheard my blond English rival remark that he intended coming to lonely Dagon's Cave on an idle exploring outing–alone.

I am not by nature criminal. I was born and raised in a hard country, and have lived most of my life on the raw edges of the world, where a man took what he wanted, if he could, and mercy was a virtue little known. But it was a torment that racked me day and night that sent me out to take the life of Richard Brent. I have lived hard, and violently, perhaps. When love overtook me, it also was fierce and violent.

Perhaps I was not wholly sane, what with my love for Eleanor Bland and my hatred for Richard Brent.

Under any other circumstances, I would have been glad to call him friend–a fine, rangy, upstanding young fellow, clear-eyed and strong. But he stood in the way of my desire and he must die.

I stepped into the dimness of the cavern and halted. I had never before visited Dagon's Cave, yet a vague sense of misplaced familiarity troubled me as I gazed on the high arching roof, the even stone walls and the dusty floor. I shrugged my shoulders, unable to place the elusive feeling; doubtless it was evoked by a similarity to caverns in the mountain country of the American Southwest where I was born and spent my childhood.

And yet I knew that I had never seen a cave like this one, whose regular aspect gave rise to myths that it was not a natural cavern, but had been hewn from the solid rock ages ago by the tiny hands of the mysterious Little People, the prehistoric beings of British legend. The whole countryside thereabouts was a haunt for ancient folk lore.

The country folk were predominantly Celtic; here the Saxon invaders had never prevailed, and the legends reached back, in that long settled countryside, further than anywhere else in England–back beyond the coming of the Saxons, aye, and incredibly beyond that distant age, beyond the coming of the Romans, to those unbelievably ancient days when the native Britons warred with black-haired Irish pirates.

The Little People, of course, had their part in the lore. Legend said that this cavern was one of their last strongholds against the conquering Celts, and hinted at lost tunnels, long fallen in or blocked up, connecting the cave with a network of subterranean corridors which honeycombed the hills. With these chance meditations vying idly in my mind with grimmer speculations, I passed through the outer chamber of the cavern and entered a narrow tunnel, which I knew by former descriptions, connected with a larger room.

It was dark in the tunnel, but not too dark for me to make out the vague, half-defaced outlines of mysterious etchings on the stone walls. I ventured to switch on my electric torch and examine them more closely. Even in their

dimness I was repelled by their abnormal and revolting character. Surely no men cast in human mold as we know it, scratched those grotesque obscenities.

The Little People–I wondered if those anthropologists were correct in their theory of a squat Mongoloid aboriginal race, so low in the scale of evolution as to be scarcely human, yet possessing a distinct, though repulsive culture of their own. They had vanished before the invading races, theory said, forming the base of all Aryan legends of trolls, elves, dwarfs and witches. Living in caves from the start, these aborigines had retreated farther and farther into the caverns of the hills before the conquerors, vanishing at last entirely, though folk-lore fancy pictures their descendants still dwelling in the lost chasms far beneath the hills, loathsome survivals of an outworn age.

I snapped off the torch and passed through the tunnel, to come out into a sort of doorway which seemed entirely too symmetrical to have been the work of nature. I was looking into a vast dim cavern, at a somewhat lower level than the outer chamber, and again I shuddered with a strange alien sense of familiarity. A short flight of steps led down from the tunnel to the floor of the cavern–tiny steps, too small for normal human feet, carved into the solid stone. Their edges were greatly worn away, as if by ages of use. I started the descent–my foot slipped suddenly. I instinctively knew what was coming–it was all in part with that strange feeling of familiarity–but I could not catch myself. I fell headlong down the steps and struck the stone floor with a crash that blotted out my senses….

Slowly consciousness returned to me, with a throbbing of my head and a sensation of bewilderment. I lifted a hand to my head and found it caked with blood. I had received a blow, or had taken a fall, but so completely had my wits been knocked out of me that my mind was an absolute blank. Where I was, who I was, I did not know. I looked about, blinking in the dim light, and saw that I was in a wide, dusty cavern. I stood at the foot of a short flight of steps which led upward into some kind of tunnel. I ran my hand dazedly through my square-cut black mane, and my eyes wandered over my massive naked limbs and powerful torso. I was clad, I noticed

absently, in a sort of loincloth, from the girdle of which swung an empty scabbard, and leathern sandals were on my feet.

Then I saw an object lying at my feet, and stooped and took it up. It was a heavy iron sword, whose broad blade was darkly stained. My fingers fitted instinctively about its hilt with the familiarity of long usage. Then suddenly I remembered and laughed to think that a fall on his head should render me, Conan of the reavers, so completely daft. Aye, it all came back to me now. It had been a raid on the Britons, on whose coasts we continually swooped with torch and sword, from the island called Eireann. That day we of the black-haired Gael had swept suddenly down on a coastal village in our long, low ships and in the hurricane of battle which followed, the Britons had at last given up the stubborn contest and retreated, warriors, women and bairns, into the deep shadows of the oak forests, whither we seldom dared follow.

But I had followed, for there was a girl of my foes whom I desired with a burning passion, a lithe, slim young creature with wavy golden hair and deep gray eyes, changing and mystic as the sea. Her name was Tamera–well I knew it, for there was trade between the races as well as war, and I had been in the villages of the Britons as a peaceful visitor, in times of rare truce.

I saw her white half-clad body flickering among the trees as she ran with the swiftness of a doe, and I followed, panting with fierce eagerness. Under the dark shadows of the gnarled oaks she fled, with me in close pursuit, while far away behind us died out the shouts of slaughter and the clashing of swords. Then we ran in silence, save for her quick labored panting, and I was so close behind her as we emerged into a narrow glade before a somber-mouthed cavern, that I caught her flying golden tresses with one mighty hand. She sank down with a despairing wail, and even so, a shout echoed her cry and I wheeled quickly to face a rangy young Briton who sprang from among the trees, the light of desperation in his eyes.

“Vertorix!” the girl wailed, her voice breaking in a sob, and fiercer rage welled up in me, for I knew the lad was her lover.

“Run for the forest, Tamera!” he shouted, and leaped at me as a panther leaps, his bronze ax whirling like a flashing wheel about his head. And then sounded the clangor of strife and the hard-drawn panting of combat.

The Briton was as tall as I, but he was lithe where I was massive. The advantage of sheer muscular power was mine, and soon he was on the defensive, striving desperately to parry my heavy strokes with his ax. Hammering on his guard like a smith on an anvil, I pressed him relentlessly, driving him irresistibly before me. His chest heaved, his breath came in labored gasps, his blood dripped from scalp, chest and thigh where my whistling blade had cut the skin, and all but gone home. As I redoubled my strokes and he bent and swayed beneath them like a sapling in a storm, I heard the girl cry: “Vertorix! Vertorix! The cave! Into the cave!”

I saw his face pale with a fear greater than that induced by my hacking sword.

“Not there!” he gasped. “Better a clean death! In Il-marenin’s name, girl, run into the forest and save yourself!”

“I will not leave you!” she cried. “The cave! It is our one chance!”

I saw her flash past us like a flying wisp of white and vanish in the cavern, and with a despairing cry, the youth launched a wild desperate stroke that nigh cleft my skull. As I staggered beneath the blow I had barely parried, he sprang away, leaped into the cavern after the girl and vanished in the gloom.

With a maddened yell that invoked all my grim Gaelic gods, I sprang recklessly after them, not reckoning if the Briton lurked beside the entrance to brain me as I rushed in. But a quick glance showed the chamber empty and a wisp of white disappearing through a dark doorway in the back wall.

I raced across the cavern and came to a sudden halt as an ax licked out of the gloom of the entrance and whistled perilously close to my black-maned head. I gave back suddenly. Now the advantage was with Vertorix, who stood in the narrow mouth of the corridor where I could hardly come at him without exposing myself to the devastating stroke of his ax.

I was near frothing with fury and the sight of a slim white form among the deep shadows behind the warrior drove me into a frenzy. I attacked savagely but warily, thrusting venomously at my foe, and drawing back from his strokes. I wished to draw him out into a wide lunge, avoid it and run him through before he could recover his balance. In the open I could have beat him down by sheer power and heavy blows, but here I could only use the point and that at a disadvantage; I always preferred the edge. But I was stubborn; if I could not come at him with a finishing stroke, neither could he or the girl escape me while I kept him hemmed in the tunnel.

It must have been the realization of this fact that prompted the girl's action, for she said something to Vertorix about looking for a way leading out, and though he cried out fiercely forbidding her to venture away into the darkness, she turned and ran swiftly down the tunnel to vanish in the dimness. My wrath rose appallingly and I nearly got my head split in my eagerness to bring down my foe before she found a means for their escape.

Then the cavern echoed with a terrible scream and Vertorix cried out like a man death-stricken, his face ashy in the gloom. He whirled, as if he had forgotten me and my sword, and raced down the tunnel like a madman, shrieking Tamera's name. From far away, as if from the bowels of the earth, I seemed to hear her answering cry, mingled with a strange sibilant clamor that electrified me with nameless but instinctive horror. Then silence fell, broken only by Vertorix's frenzied cries, receding farther and farther into the earth.

Recovering myself I sprang into the tunnel and raced after the Briton as recklessly as he had run after the girl. And to give me my due, red-handed reaver though I was, cutting down my rival from behind was less in my mind than discovering what dread thing had Tamera in its clutches.

As I ran along I noted absently that the sides of the tunnel were scrawled with monstrous pictures, and realized suddenly and creepily that this must be the dread Cavern of the Children of the Night, tales of which had crossed the narrow sea to resound horrifically in the ears of the Gaels. Terror of me must have ridden Tamera hard to have driven her into the cavern shunned by her people, where, it was said, lurked the survivals of that grisly race

which inhabited the land before the coming of the Picts and Britons, and which had fled before them into the unknown caverns of the hills.

Ahead of me the tunnel opened into a wide chamber, and I saw the white form of Vertorix glimmer momentarily in the semidarkness and vanish in what appeared to be the entrance of a corridor opposite the mouth of the tunnel I had just traversed. Instantly there sounded a short, fierce shout and the crash of a hard-driven blow, mixed with the hysterical screams of a girl and a medley of serpent-like hissing that made my hair bristle. And at that instant I shot out of the tunnel, running at full speed, and realized too late the floor of the cavern lay several feet below the level of the tunnel. My flying feet missed the tiny steps and I crashed terrifically on the solid stone floor.

Now as I stood in the semi-darkness, rubbing my aching head, all this came back to me, and I stared fearsomely across the vast chamber at that black cryptic corridor into which Tamera and her lover had disappeared, and over which silence lay like a pall. Gripping my sword, I warily crossed the great still cavern and peered into the corridor. Only a denser darkness met my eyes. I entered, striving to pierce the gloom, and as my foot slipped on a wide wet smear on the stone floor, the raw acrid scent of fresh-spilled blood met my nostrils. Someone or something had died there, either the young Briton or his unknown attacker.

I stood there uncertainly, all the supernatural fears that are the heritage of the Gael rising in my primitive soul. I could turn and stride out of these accursed mazes, into the clear sunlight and down to the clean blue sea where my comrades, no doubt, impatiently awaited me after the routing of the Britons. Why should I risk my life among these grisly rat dens? I was eaten with curiosity to know what manner of beings haunted the cavern, and who were called the Children of the Night by the Britons, but it was my love for the yellow-haired girl which drove me down that dark tunnel–and love her I did, in my way, and would have been kind to her, had I carried her away to my island haunt.

I walked softly along the corridor, blade ready. What sort of creatures the Children of the Night were, I had no idea, but the tales of the Britons had lent them a distinctly inhuman nature.

The darkness closed around me as I advanced, until I was moving in utter blackness. My groping left hand encountered a strangely carven doorway, and at that instant something hissed like a viper beside me and slashed fiercely at my thigh. I struck back savagely and felt my blind stroke crunch home, and something fell at my feet and died. What thing I had slain in the dark I could not know, but it must have been at least partly human because the shallow gash in my thigh had been made with a blade of some sort, and not by fangs or talons. And I sweated with horror, for the gods know, the hissing voice of the Thing had resembled no human tongue I had ever heard.

And now in the darkness ahead of me I heard the sound repeated, mingled with horrible slitherings, as if numbers of reptilian creatures were approaching. I stepped quickly into the entrance my groping hand had discovered and came near repeating my headlong fall, for instead of letting into another level corridor, the entrance gave onto a flight of dwarfish steps on which I floundered wildly.

Recovering my balance I went on cautiously, groping along the sides of the shaft for support. I seemed to be descending into the very bowels of the earth, but I dared not turn back. Suddenly, far below me, I glimpsed a faint eery light. I went on, perforce, and came to a spot where the shaft opened into another great vaulted chamber; and I shrank back, aghast.

In the center of the chamber stood a grim, black altar; it had been rubbed all over with a sort of phosphorous, so that it glowed dully, lending a semi-illumination to the shadowy cavern. Towering behind it on a pedestal of human skulls, lay a cryptic black object, carven with mysterious hieroglyphics. The Black Stone! The ancient, ancient Stone before which, the Britons said, the Children of the Night bowed in gruesome worship, and whose origin was lost in the black mists of a hideously distant past. Once, legend said, it had stood in that grim circle of monoliths called Stonehenge, before its votaries had been driven like chaff before the bows of the Picts.

But I gave it but a passing, shuddering glance. Two figures lay, bound with rawhide thongs, on the glowing black altar. One was Tamera; the other was Vertorix, bloodstained and disheveled. His bronze ax, crusted with clotted blood, lay near the altar. And before the glowing stone squatted Horror.

Though I had never seen one of those ghoulish aborigines, I knew this thing for what it was, and shuddered. It was a man of a sort, but so low in the stage of life that its distorted humanness was more horrible than its bestiality.

Erect, it could not have been five feet in height. Its body was scrawny and deformed, its head disproportionately large. Lank snaky hair fell over a square inhuman face with flabby writhing lips that bared yellow fangs, flat spreading nostrils and great yellow slant eyes. I knew the creature must be able to see in the dark as well as a cat. Centuries of skulking in dim caverns had lent the race terrible and inhuman attributes. But the most repellent feature was its skin: scaly, yellow and mottled, like the hide of a serpent. A loin-clout made of a real snake's skin girt its lean loins, and its taloned hands gripped a short stone-tipped spear and a sinister-looking mallet of polished flint.

So intently was it gloating over its captives, it evidently had not heard my stealthy descent. As I hesitated in the shadows of the shaft, far above me I heard a soft sinister rustling that chilled the blood in my veins.

The Children were creeping down the shaft behind me, and I was trapped. I saw other entrances opening on the chamber, and I acted, realizing that an alliance with Vertorix was our only hope. Enemies though we were, we were men, cast in the same mold, trapped in the lair of these indescribable monstrosities.

As I stepped from the shaft, the horror beside the altar jerked up his head and glared full at me. And as he sprang up, I leaped and he crumpled, blood spurting, as my heavy sword split his reptilian heart. But even as he died, he gave tongue in an abhorrent shriek which was echoed far up the shaft. In desperate haste I cut Vertorix's bonds and dragged him to his feet. And I turned to Tamera, who in that dire extremity did not shrink from me, but looked up at me with pleading, terror-dilated eyes. Vertorix wasted no time in words, realizing chance had made allies of us. He snatched up his ax as I freed the girl.

"We can't go up the shaft," he explained swiftly; "we'll have the whole pack upon us quickly. They caught Tamera as she sought for an exit, and

overpowered me by sheer numbers when I followed. They dragged us hither and all but that carrion scattered–bearing word of the sacrifice through all their burrows, I doubt not. Il-marenin alone knows how many of my people, stolen in the night, have died on that altar. We must take our chance in one of these tunnels–all lead to hell! Follow me!”

Seizing Tamera’s hand he ran fleetly into the nearest tunnel and I followed. A glance back into the chamber before a turn in the corridor blotted it from view showed a revolting horde streaming out of the shaft. The tunnel slanted steeply upward, and suddenly ahead of us we saw a bar of gray light. But the next instant our cries of hope changed to curses of bitter disappointment. There was daylight, aye, drifting in through a cleft in the vaulted roof, but far, far above our reach. Behind us the pack gave tongue exultingly. And I halted.

“Save yourselves if you can,” I growled. “Here I make my stand. They can see in the dark and I cannot.

Here at least I can see them. Go!”

But Vertorix halted also. “Little use to be hunted like rats to our doom. There is no escape. Let us meet our fate like men.”

Tamera cried out, wringing her hands, but she clung to her lover.

“Stand behind me with the girl,” I grunted. “When I fall, dash out her brains with your ax lest they take her alive again. Then sell your own life as high as you may, for there is none to avenge us.”

His keen eyes met mine squarely.

“We worship different gods, reaver,” he said, “but all gods love brave men. Mayhap we shall meet again, beyond the Dark.”

“Hail and farewell, Briton!” I growled, and our right hands gripped like steel.

“Hail and farewell, Gael!”

And I wheeled as a hideous horde swept up the tunnel and burst into the dim light, a flying nightmare of streaming snaky hair, foam-flecked lips and glaring eyes. Thundering my war-cry I sprang to meet them and my heavy sword sang and a head spun grinning from its shoulder on an arching fountain of blood.

They came upon me like a wave and the fighting madness of my race was upon me. I fought as a maddened beast fights and at every stroke I clove through flesh and bone, and blood spattered in a crimson rain.

Then as they surged in and I went down beneath the sheer weight of their numbers, a fierce yell cut the din and Vertorix's ax sang above me, splattering blood and brains like water. The press slackened and I staggered up, trampling the writhing bodies beneath my feet.

"A stair behind us!" the Briton was screaming. "Half hidden in an angle of the wall! It must lead to daylight! Up it, in the name of Il-marenin!"

So we fell back, fighting our way inch by inch. The vermin fought like blood-hungry devils, clambering over the bodies of the slain to screech and hack. Both of us were streaming blood at every step when we reached the mouth of the shaft, into which Tamera had preceded us.

Screaming like very fiends the Children surged in to drag us down. The shaft was not as light as had been the corridor, and it grew darker as we climbed, but our foes could only come at us from in front. By the gods, we slaughtered them till the stair was littered with mangled corpses and the Children frothed like mad wolves! Then suddenly they abandoned the fray and raced back down the steps.

"What portends this?" gasped Vertorix, shaking the bloody sweat from his eyes.

"Up the shaft, quick!" I panted. "They mean to mount some other stair and come at us from above!"

So we raced up those accursed steps, slipping and stumbling, and as we fled past a black tunnel that opened into the shaft, far down it we heard a

frightful howling. An instant later we emerged from the shaft into a winding corridor, dimly illumined by a vague gray light filtering in from above, and somewhere in the bowels of the earth I seemed to hear the thunder of rushing water. We started down the corridor and as we did so, a heavy weight smashed on my shoulders, knocking me headlong, and a mallet crashed again and again on my head, sending dull red flashes of agony across my brain. With a volcanic wrench I dragged my attacker off and under me, and tore out his throat with my naked fingers. And his fangs met in my arm in his death-bite.

Reeling up, I saw that Tamera and Vertorix had passed out of sight. I had been somewhat behind them, and they had run on, knowing nothing of the fiend which had leaped on my shoulders. Doubtless they thought I was still close on their heels. A dozen steps I took, then halted. The corridor branched and I knew not which way my companions had taken. At blind venture I turned into the left-hand branch, and staggered on in the semidarkness. I was weak from fatigue and loss of blood, dizzy and sick from the blows I had received. Only the thought of Tamera kept me doggedly on my feet. Now distinctly I heard the sound of an unseen torrent.

That I was not far underground was evident by the dim light which filtered in from somewhere above, and I momentarily expected to come upon another stair. But when I did, I halted in black despair; instead of up, it led down. Somewhere far behind me I heard faintly the howls of the pack, and I went down, plunging into utter darkness. At last I struck a level and went along blindly. I had given up all hope of escape, and only hoped to find Tamera–if she and her lover had not found a way of escape–and die with her. The thunder of rushing water was above my head now, and the tunnel was slimy and dank. Drops of moisture fell on my head and I knew I was passing under the river.

Then I blundered again upon steps cut in the stone, and these led upward. I scrambled up as fast as my stiffening wounds would allow–and I had taken punishment enough to have killed an ordinary man. Up I went and up, and suddenly daylight burst on me through a cleft in the solid rock. I stepped into the blaze of the sun. I was standing on a ledge high above the rushing waters of a river which raced at awesome speed between towering cliffs.

The ledge on which I stood was close to the top of the cliff; safety was within arm's length. But I hesitated and such was my love for the golden-haired girl that I was ready to retrace my steps through those black tunnels on the mad hope of finding her. Then I started.

Across the river I saw another cleft in the cliff-wall which fronted me, with a ledge similar to that on which I stood, but longer. In olden times, I doubt not, some sort of primitive bridge connected the two ledges–possibly before the tunnel was dug beneath the river-bed. Now as I watched, two figures emerged upon that other ledge–one gashed, dust-stained, limping, gripping a bloodstained ax; the other slim, white and girlish.

Vertorix and Tamera! They had taken the other branch of the corridor at the fork and had evidently followed the windows of the tunnel to emerge as I had done, except that I had taken the left turn and passed clear under the river. And now I saw that they were in a trap. On that side the cliffs rose half a hundred feet higher than on my side of the river, and so sheer a spider could scarce have scaled them.

There were only two ways of escape from the ledge: back through the fiend-haunted tunnels, or straight down to the river which raved far beneath.

I saw Vertorix look up the sheer cliffs and then down, and shake his head in despair. Tamera put her arms about his neck, and though I could not hear their voices for the rush of the river, I saw them smile, and then they went together to the edge of the ledge. And out of the cleft swarmed a loathsome mob, as foul reptiles writhe up out of the darkness, and they stood blinking in the sunlight like the night-things they were. I gripped my sword-hilt in the agony of my helplessness until the blood trickled from under my fingernails. Why had not the pack followed me instead of my companions?

The Children hesitated an instant as the two Britons faced them, then with a laugh Vertorix hurled his ax far out into the rushing river, and turning, caught Tamera in a last embrace. Together they sprang far out, and still locked in each other's arms, hurtled downward, struck the madly foaming water that seemed to leap up to meet them, and vanished. And the wild river swept on like a blind, insensate monster, thundering along the echoing cliffs.

A moment I stood frozen, then like a man in a dream I turned, caught the edge of the cliff above me and wearily drew myself up and over, and stood on my feet above the cliffs, hearing like a dim dream the roar of the river far beneath.

I reeled up, dazedly clutching my throbbing head, on which dried blood was clotted. I glared wildly about me. I had clambered the cliffs–no, by the thunder of Crom, I was still in the cavern! I reached for my sword–

The mists faded and I stared about dizzily, orienting myself with space and time. I stood at the foot of the steps down which I had fallen. I who had been Conan the reaver, was John O'Brien. Was all that grotesque interlude a dream? Could a mere dream appear so vivid? Even in dreams, we often know we are dreaming, but Conan the reaver had no cognizance of any other existence. More, he remembered his own past life as a living man remembers, though in the waking mind of John O'Brien, that memory faded into dust and mist. But the adventures of Conan in the Cavern of the Children stood clear-etched in the mind of John O'Brien.

I glanced across the dim chamber toward the entrance of the tunnel into which Vertorix had followed the girl. But I looked in vain, seeing only the bare blank wall of the cavern. I crossed the chamber, switched on my electric torch–miraculously unbroken in my fall–and felt along the wall.

Ha! I started, as from an electric shock! Exactly where the entrance should have been, my fingers detected a difference in material, a section which was rougher than the rest of the wall. I was convinced that it was of comparatively modern workmanship; the tunnel had been walled up.

I thrust against it, exerting all my strength, and it seemed to me that the section was about to give. I drew back, and taking a deep breath, launched my full weight against it, backed by all the power of my giant muscles. The brittle, decaying wall gave way with a shattering crash and I catapulted through in a shower of stones and falling masonry.

I scrambled up, a sharp cry escaping me. I stood in a tunnel, and I could not mistake the feeling of similarity this time. Here Vertorix had first fallen foul

of the Children, as they dragged Tamera away, and here where I now stood the floor had been awash with blood.

I walked down the corridor like a man in a trance. Soon I should come to the doorway on the left–aye, there it was, the strangely carven portal, at the mouth of which I had slain the unseen being which reared up in the dark beside me. I shivered momentarily. Could it be possible that remnants of that foul race still lurked hideously in these remote caverns?

I turned into the doorway and my light shone down a long, slanting shaft, with tiny steps cut into the solid stone. Down these had Conan the reaver gone groping and down them went I, John O'Brien, with memories of that other life filling my brain with vague phantasms. No light glimmered ahead of me but I came into the great dim chamber I had known of yore, and I shuddered as I saw the grim black altar etched in the gleam of my torch. Now no bound figures writhed there, no crouching horror gloated before it. Nor did the pyramid of skulls support the Black Stone before which unknown races had bowed before Egypt was born out of time's dawn. Only a littered heap of dust lay strewn where the skulls had upheld the hellish thing. No, that had been no dream: I was John O'Brien, but I had been Conan of the reavers in that other life, and that grim interlude a brief episode of reality which I had relived.

I entered the tunnel down which we had fled, shining a beam of light ahead, and saw the bar of gray light drifting down from above–just as in that other, lost age. Here the Briton and I, Conan, had turned at bay.

I turned my eyes from the ancient cleft high up in the vaulted roof, and looked for the stair. There it was, half concealed by an angle in the wall.

I mounted, remembering how hardly Vertorix and I had gone up so many ages before, with the horde hissing and frothing at our heels. I found myself tense with dread as I approached the dark, gaping entrance through which the pack had sought to cut us off. I had snapped off the light when I came into the dim-lit corridor below, and now I glanced into the well of blackness which opened on the stair. And with a cry I started back, nearly losing my footing on the worn steps. Sweating in the semidarkness I switched on the light and directed its beam into the cryptic opening, revolver in hand.

I saw only the bare rounded sides of a small shaftlike tunnel and I laughed nervously. My imagination was running riot; I could have sworn that hideous yellow eyes glared terribly at me from the darkness, and that a crawling something had scuttered away down the tunnel. I was foolish to let these imaginings upset me. The Children had long vanished from these caverns; a nameless and abhorrent race closer to the serpent than the man, they had centuries ago faded back into the oblivion from which they had crawled in the black dawn ages of the earth.

I came out of the shaft into the winding corridor, which, as I remembered of old, was lighter. Here from the shadows a lurking thing had leaped on my back while my companions ran on, unknowing. What a brute of a man Conan had been, to keep going after receiving such savage wounds! Aye, in that age all men were iron.

I came to the place where the tunnel forked and as before I took the left-hand branch and came to the shaft that led down. Down this I went, listening for the roar of the river, but not hearing it. Again the darkness shut in about the shaft, so I was forced to have recourse to my electric torch again, lest I lose my footing and plunge to my death. Oh, I, John O'Brien, am not nearly so sure-footed as was I, Conan the reaver; no, nor as tigerishly powerful and quick, either.

I soon struck the dank lower level and felt again the dampness that denoted my position under the river-bed, but still I could not hear the rush of the water. And indeed I knew that whatever mighty river had rushed roaring to the sea in those ancient times, there was no such body of water among the hills today. I halted, flashing my light about. I was in a vast tunnel, not very high of roof, but broad. Other smaller tunnels branched off from it and I wondered at the network which apparently honeycombed the hills.

I cannot describe the grim, gloomy effect of those dark, low-roofed corridors far below the earth. Over all hung an overpowering sense of unspeakable antiquity. Why had the Little People carved out these mysterious crypts, and in which black age? Were these caverns their last refuge from the onrushing tides of humanity, or their castles since time immemorial? I shook my head in bewilderment; the bestiality of the Children I had seen, yet somehow they had been able to carve these tunnels

and chambers that might balk modern engineers. Even supposing they had but completed a task begun by nature, still it was a stupendous work for a race of dwarfish aborigines.

Then I realized with a start that I was spending more time in these gloomy tunnels than I cared for, and began to hunt for the steps by which Conan had ascended. I found them and, following them up, breathed again deeply in relief as the sudden glow of daylight filled the shaft. I came out upon the ledge, now worn away until it was little more than a bump on the face of the cliff. And I saw the great river, which had roared like a prisoned monster between the sheer walls of its narrow canyon, had dwindled away with the passing eons until it was no more than a tiny stream, far beneath me, trickling soundlessly among the stones on its way to the sea.

Aye, the surface of the earth changes; the rivers swell or shrink, the mountains heave and topple, the lakes dry up, the continents alter; but under the earth the work of lost, mysterious hands slumbers untouched by the sweep of Time. Their work, aye, but what of the hands that reared that work? Did they, too, lurk beneath the bosoms of the hills?

How long I stood there, lost in dim speculations, I do not know, but suddenly, glancing across at the other ledge, crumbling and weathered, I shrank back into the entrance behind me. Two figures came out upon the ledge and I gasped to see that they were Richard Brent and Eleanor Bland. Now I remembered why I had come to the cavern and my hand instinctively sought the revolver in my pocket. They did not see me. But I could see them, and hear them plainly, too, since no roaring river now thundered between the ledges.

“By gad, Eleanor,” Brent was saying, “I’m glad you decided to come with me. Who would have guessed there was anything to those old tales about hidden tunnels leading from the cavern? I wonder how that section of wall came to collapse? I thought I heard a crash just as we entered the outer cave. Do you suppose some beggar was in the cavern ahead of us, and broke it in?”

“I don’t know,” she answered. “I remember–oh, I don’t know. It almost seems as if I’d been here before, or dreamed I had. I seem to faintly

remember, like a far-off nightmare, running, running, running endlessly through these dark corridors with hideous creatures on my heels….”

“Was I there?” jokingly asked Brent.

“Yes, and John, too,” she answered. “But you were not Richard Brent, and John was not John O’Brien.

No, and I was not Eleanor Bland, either. Oh, it’s so dim and far-off I can’t describe it at all. It’s hazy and misty and terrible.”

“I understand, a little,” he said unexpectedly. “Ever since we came to the place where the wall had fallen and revealed the old tunnel, I’ve had a sense of familiarity with the place. There was horror and danger and battle–and love, too.”

He stepped nearer the edge to look down in the gorge, and Eleanor cried out sharply and suddenly, seizing him in a convulsive grasp.

“Don’t, Richard, don’t! Hold me, oh, hold me tight!”

He caught her in his arms. “Why, Eleanor, dear, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” she faltered, but she clung closer to him and I saw she was trembling. “Just a strange feeling–rushing dizziness and fright, just as if I were falling from a great height. Don’t go near the edge, Dick; it scares me.”

“I won’t, dear,” he answered, drawing her closer to him, and continuing hesitantly: “Eleanor, there’s something I’ve wanted to ask you for a long time–well, I haven’t the knack of putting things in an elegant way. I love you, Eleanor; always have. You know that. But if you don’t love me, I’ll take myself off and won’t annoy you any more. Only please tell me one way or another, for I can’t stand it any longer. Is it I or the American?”

“You, Dick,” she answered, hiding her face on his shoulder. “It’s always been you, though I didn’t know it. I think a great deal of John O’Brien. I didn’t know which of you I really loved. But to-day as we came through

those terrible tunnels and climbed those fearful stairs, and just now, when I thought for some strange reason we were falling from the ledge, I realized it was you I loved–that I always loved you, through more lives than this one. Always!”

Their lips met and I saw her golden head cradled on his shoulder. My lips were dry, my heart cold, yet my soul was at peace. They belonged to each other. Eons ago they lived and loved, and because of that love they suffered and died. And I, Conan, had driven them to that doom.

I saw them turn toward the cleft, their arms about each other, then I heard Tamera–I mean Eleanor–shriek; I saw them both recoil. And out of the cleft a horror came writhing, a loathsome, brain-shattering thing that blinked in the clean sunlight. Aye, I knew it of old–vestige of a forgotten age, it came writhing its horrid shape up out of the darkness of the Earth and the lost past to claim its own.

What three thousand years of retrogression can do to a race hideous in the beginning, I saw, and shuddered. And instinctively I knew that in all the world it was the only one of its kind, a monster that had lived on. God alone knows how many centuries, wallowing in the slime of its dank subterranean lairs.

Before the Children had vanished, the race must have lost all human semblance, living as they did the life of the reptile. This thing was more like a giant serpent than anything else, but it had aborted legs and snaky arms with hooked talons. It crawled on its belly, writhing back mottled lips to bare needlelike fangs, which I felt must drip with venom. It hissed as it reared up its ghastly head on a horribly long neck, while its yellow slanted eyes glittered with all the horror that is spawned in the black lairs under the earth.

I knew those eyes had blazed at me from the dark tunnel opening on the stair. For some reason the creature had fled from me, possibly because it feared my light, and it stood to reason that it was the only one remaining in the caverns, else I had been set upon in the darkness. But for it, the tunnels could be traversed in safety.

Now the reptilian thing writhed toward the humans trapped on the ledge. Brent had thrust Eleanor behind him and stood, face ashy, to guard her as best he could. And I gave thanks silently that I, John O'Brien, could pay the debt I, Conan the reaver, owed these lovers since long ago.

The monster reared up and Brent, with cold courage, sprang to meet it with his naked hands. Taking quick aim, I fired once. The shot echoed like the crack of doom between the towering cliffs, and the Horror, with a hideously human scream, staggered wildly, swayed and pitched headlong, knotting and writhing like a wounded python, to tumble from the sloping ledge and fall plummetlike to the rocks far below.

Delenda Est

"It's no empire, I tell you! It's only a sham. Empire? Pah! Pirates, that's all we are!" It was Hunegais, of course, the ever moody and gloomy, with his braided black locks and drooping moustaches betraying his Slavonic blood. He sighed gustily, and the Falernian wine slopped over the rim of the jade goblet clenched in his brawny hand, to stain his purple, gilt-embroidered tunic. He drank noisily, after the manner of a horse, and returned with melancholy gusto to his original complaint.

"What have we done in Africa? Destroyed the big landholders and the priests, set ourselves up as landlords. Who works the land? Vandals? Not at all! The same men who worked it under the Romans.

We've merely stepped into Roman shoes. We levy taxes and rents, and are forced to defend the land from the accursed Berbers. Our weakness is in our numbers. We can't amalgamate with the people; we'd be absorbed. We can't make allies and subjects out of them; all we can do is maintain a sort of military prestige–we are a small body of aliens sitting in castles and for the present enforcing our rule over a big native population who, it's true, hate us no worse than they hated the Romans, but–"

"Some of that hate could be done away with," interrupted Athaulf. He was younger than Hunegais, clean shaven, and not unhandsome, and his manners were less primitive. He was a Suevi, whose youth had been spent

as a hostage in the East Roman court. “They are orthodox; if we could bring ourselves to renounce Arian–”

“*No!* ” Hunegais’ heavy jaws came together with a snap that would have splintered lesser teeth than his.

His dark eyes flamed with the fanaticism that was, among all the Teutons, the exclusive possession of his race. “Never! We are the masters! It is theirs to submit–not ours. We *know* the truth of Arian; if the miserable Africans can not realize their mistake, they must be made to see it–by torch and sword and rack, if necessary!” Then his eyes dulled again, and with another gusty sigh from the depths of his belly, he groped for the wine jug.

“In a hundred years the Vandal kingdom will be a memory,” he predicted. “All that holds it together now is the will of Genseric.” He pronounced it Geiserich.

The individual so named laughed, leaned back in his carven ebony chair and stretched out his muscular legs before him. Those were the legs of a horseman, but their owner had exchanged the saddle for the deck of a war galley. Within a generation he had turned a race of horsemen into a race of sea-rovers. He was the king of a race whose name had already become a term for destruction, and he was the possessor of the finest brain in the known world.

Born on the banks of the Danube and grown to manhood on that long trek westward, when the drifts of the nations crushed over the Roman palisades, he had brought to the crown forged for him in Spain all the wild wisdom the times could teach, in the feasting of swords and the surge and crush of races. His wild riders had swept the spears of the Roman rulers of Spain into oblivion. When the Visigoths and the Romans joined hands and began to look southward, it was the intrigues of Genseric which brought Attila’s scarred Huns swarming westward, tusking the flaming horizons with their myriad lances. Attila was dead, now, and none knew where lay his bones and his treasures, guarded by the ghosts of five hundred slaughtered slaves; his name thundered around the world, but in his day he had been but one of the pawns moved resistlessly by the hand of the Vandal king.

And when, after Chalons, the Gothic hosts moved southward through the Pyrenees, Genseric had not waited to be crushed by superior numbers. Men still cursed the name of Boniface, who called on Genseric to aid him against his rival, Aetius, and opened the Vandal's road to Africa. His reconciliation with Rome had been too late, vain as the courage with which he had sought to undo what he had done.

Boniface died on a Vandal spear, and a new kingdom rose in the south. And now Aetius, too, was dead, and the great war galleys of the Vandals were moving northward, the long oars dipping and flashing silver in the starlight, the great vessels heeling and rocking to the lift of the waves.

And in the cabin of the foremost galley, Genseric listened to the conversation of his captains, and smiled gently as he combed his unruly yellow beard with his muscular fingers. There was in his veins no trace of the Scythic blood which set his race somewhat aside from the other Teutons, from the long ago when scattered steppes-riders, drifting westward before the conquering Sarmatians, had come among the people dwelling on the upper reaches of the Elbe. Genseric was pure German; of medium height, with a magnificent sweep of shoulders and chest, and a massive corded neck, his frame promised as much of physical vitality as his wide blue eyes reflected mental vigor.

He was the strongest man in the known world, and he was a pirate–the first of the Teutonic sea-raiders whom men later called Vikings; but his domain of conquest was not the Baltic nor the blue North Sea, but the sunlit shores of the Mediterranean.

"And the will of Genseric," he laughed, in reply to Hunegais' last remark, "is that we drink and feast and let tomorrow take care of itself."

"So you say!" snorted Hunegais, with the freedom that still existed among the barbarians. "When did you ever let a tomorrow take care of itself? You plot and plot, not for tomorrow alone, but for a thousand tomorrows to come! You need not masquerade with *us*! We are not Romans to be fooled into thinking *you* a fool–as Boniface was!"

"Aetius was no fool," muttered Thrasamund.

“But he’s dead, and we are sailing on Rome,” answered Hunegais, with the first sign of satisfaction he had yet evinced. “Alaric didn’t get all the loot, thank God! And I’m glad Attila lost his nerve at the last minute–the more plunder for us.”

“Attila remembered Chalons,” drawled Athaulf. “There is something about Rome that lives–by the saints, it is strange. Even when the empire seems most ruined–torn, befouled and tattered–some part of it springs into life again. Stilicho, Theodosius, Aetius–who can tell? Tonight in Rome there may be a man sleeping who will overthrow us all.”

Hunegais snorted and hammered on the wine-stained board.

“Rome is as dead as the white mare I rode at the taking of Carthage! We have but to stretch our hands and grasp the plunder of her!”

“There was a great general once who thought as much,” said Thrasamund drowsily. “A Carthaginian, too, by God! I have forgotten his name. But he beat the Romans at every turn. Cut, slash, that was his way!”

“Well,” remarked Hunegais, “he must have lost at last, or he would have destroyed Rome.”

“That’s so!” ejaculated Thrasamund.

“We are not Carthaginians,” laughed Genseric. “And who said aught of plundering Rome? Are we not merely sailing to the imperial city in answer to the appeal of the Empress who is beset by jealous foes?

And now, get out of here, all of you. I want to sleep.”

The cabin door slammed on the morose predictions of Hunegais, the witty retorts of Athaulf, the mumble of the others. Genseric rose and moved over to the table, to pour himself a last glass of wine. He walked with a limp; a Frankish spear had girded him in the leg long years ago.

He lifted the jeweled goblet to his lips–wheeled with a startled oath. He had not heard the cabin door open, but a man was standing across the table from

him.

“By Odin!” Genseric’s Arianism was scarcely skin-deep. “What do you in my cabin?”

The voice was calm, almost placid, after the first startled oath. The king was too shrewd often to evince his real emotions. His hand stealthily closed on the hilt of his sword. A sudden and unexpected stroke–

But the stranger made no hostile movement. He was a stranger to Genseric, and the Vandal knew he was neither Teuton nor Roman. He was tall, dark, with a stately head, his dark flowing locks confined by a dark crimson band. A curling black patriarchal beard swept his breast. A dim, misplaced familiarity twitched at the Vandal’s mind as he looked.

“I have not come to harm you!” The voice was deep, strong and resonant. Genseric could tell little of his attire, since he was masked in a wide dark cloak. The Vandal wondered if he grasped a weapon under that cloak.

“Who are you, and how did you get into my cabin?” he demanded.

“Who I am, it matters not,” returned the other. “I have been on this ship since you sailed from Carthage.

You sailed at night; I came aboard then.”

“I never saw you in Carthage,” muttered Genseric. “And you are a man who would stand out in a crowd.”

“I dwell in Carthage,” the stranger replied. “I have dwelt there for many years. I was born there, and all my fathers before me. Carthage is my life!” The last sentence was uttered in a voice so passionate and fierce that Genseric involuntarily stepped back, his eyes narrowing.

“The folk of the city have some cause of complaint against us,” said he, “but the looting and destruction was not by my orders; even then it was my intention to make Carthage my capital. If you suffered loss by the sack, why–”

“Not from your wolves,” grimly answered the other. “Sack of the city? I have seen such a sack as not even you, barbarian, have dreamed of! They called you barbaric. I have seen what civilized Romans can do.”

“Romans have not plundered Carthage in my memory,” muttered Genseric, frowning in some perplexity.

“Poetic justice!” cried the stranger, his hand emerging from his cloak to strike down on the table.

Genseric noted the hand was muscular yet white, the hand of an aristocrat. “Roman greed and treachery destroyed Carthage; trade rebuilt her, in another guise. Now you, barbarian, sail from her harbors to humble her conqueror! Is it any wonder that old dreams silver the cords of your ships and creep amidst the holds, and that forgotten ghosts burst their immemorial tombs to glide upon your decks?”

“Who said anything of humbling Rome?” uneasily demanded Genseric. “I merely sail to arbitrate a dispute as to succession–”

“Pah!” Again the hand slammed down on the table. “If you knew what I know, you would sweep that accursed city clean of life before you turn your prows southward again. Even now those you sail to aid plot your ruin–and a traitor is on board your ship!”

“What do you mean?” Still there was neither excitement nor passion in the Vandal’s voice.

“Suppose I gave you proof that your most trusted companion and vassal plots your ruin with those to whose aid you lift your sails?”

“Give me that proof; then ask what you will,” answered Genseric with a touch of grimness.

“Take this in token of faith!” The stranger rang a coin on the table, and caught up a silken girdle which Genseric himself had carelessly thrown down.

“Follow me to the cabin of your counsellor and scribe, the handsomest man among the barbarians–”

“Athaulf?” In spite of himself Genseric started. “I trust him beyond all others.”

“Then you are not as wise as I deemed you,” grimly answered the other. “The traitor within is to be feared more than the foe without. It was not the legions of Rome which conquered *me*–it was the traitors within my gates. Not alone in swords and ships does Rome deal, but with the souls of men. I have come from a far land to save your empire and your life. In return I ask but one thing: drench Rome in blood!”

For an instant the stranger stood transfigured, mighty arm lifted, fist clenched, dark eyes flashing fire. An aura of terrific power emanated from him, awing even the wild Vandal. Then sweeping his purple cloak about him with a kingly gesture, the man stalked to the door and passed through it, despite Genseric’s exclamation and effort to detain him.

Swearing in bewilderment, the king limped to the door, opened it, and glared out on the deck. A lamp burned on the poop. A reek of unwashed bodies came up from the hold where the weary rowers toiled at their oars. The rhythmic clack vied with a dwindling chorus from the ships which followed in a long ghostly line. The moon struck silver from the waves, shone white on the deck. A single warrior stood on guard outside Genseric’s door, the moonlight sparkling on his crested golden helmet and Roman corselet.

He lifted his javelin in salute.

“Where did he go?” demanded the king.

“Who, my lord?” inquired the warrior stupidly.

“The tall man, dolt,” exclaimed Genseric impatiently. “The man in the purple cloak who just left my cabin.”

“None has left your cabin since the lord Hunegais and the others went forth, my lord,” replied the Vandal in bewilderment.

“Liar!” Genseric’s sword was a ripple of silver in his hand as it slid from its sheath. The warrior paled and shrank back.

“As God is my witness, king,” he swore, “no such man have I seen this night.”

Genseric glared at him; the Vandal king was a judge of men and he knew this one was not lying. He felt a peculiar twitching of his scalp, and turning without a word, limped hurriedly to Athaulf ’s cabin. There he hesitated, then threw open the door.

Athaulf lay sprawled across a table in an attitude which needed no second glance to classify. His face was purple, his glassy eyes distended, and his tongue lolled out blackly. About his neck, knotted in such a knot as seamen make, was Genseric’s silken girdle. Near one hand lay a quill, near the other ink and a piece of parchment. Catching it up, Genseric read laboriously.

“To her majesty the empress of Rome:

“I, thy faithful servant, have done thy bidding, and am prepared to persuade the barbarian I serve to delay his onset on the imperial city until the aid you expect from Byzantium has arrived. Then I will guide him into the bay I mentioned, where he can be caught as in a vise and destroyed with his whole fleet, and–”

The writing ceased with an erratic scrawl. Genseric glared down at him, and again the short hairs lifted on his scalp. There was no sign of the tall stranger, and the Vandal knew he would never be seen again.

“Rome shall pay for this,” he muttered; the mask he wore in public had fallen away; the Vandal’s face was that of a hungry wolf. In his glare, in the knotting of his mighty hand, it took no sage to read the doom of Rome. He suddenly remembered that he still clutched in his hand the coin the stranger had dropped on his table. He glanced at it, and his breath hissed between his teeth, as he recognized the characters of an old, forgotten language, the

features of a man which he had often seen carved in ancient marble in old Carthage, preserved from Roman hate.

“Hannibal!” muttered Genseric.

The Cairn on the Headland

“This is the cairn you seek,” I said, laying my hand gingerly on one of the rough stones which composed the strangely symmetrical heap.

An avid interest burned in Ortali’s dark eyes. His gaze swept the landscape and came back to rest on the great pile of massive weather-worn boulders.

“What a wild, weird, desolate place!” he said. “Who would have thought to find such a spot in this vicinity? Except for the smoke rising yonder, one would scarcely dream that beyond that headland lies a great city! Here there is scarcely even a fisherman’s hut within sight.”

“The people shun the cairn as they have shunned it for centuries,” I replied.

“Why?”

“You’ve asked me that before,” I replied impatiently. “I can only answer that they now avoid by habit what their ancestors avoided through knowledge.”

“Knowledge!” he laughed derisively. “Superstition!”

I looked at him somberly with unveiled hate. Two men could scarcely have been of more opposite types.

He was slender, self-possessed, unmistakably Latin with his dark eyes and sophisticated air. I am massive, clumsy and bear-like, with cold blue eyes and tousled red hair. We were countrymen in that we were born in the same land; but the homelands of our ancestors were as far apart as South from North.

“Nordic superstition,” he repeated. “I cannot imagine a Latin people allowing such a mystery as this to go unexplored all these years. The Latins

are too practical–too prosaic, if you will. Are you sure of the date of this pile?"

"I find no mention of it in any manuscript prior to 1014 A. D.," I growled, "and I've read all such manuscripts extant, in the original. MacLiag, King Brian Boru's poet, speaks of the rearing of the cairn immediately after the battle, and there can be little doubt but that this is the pile referred to. It is mentioned briefly in the later chronicles of the Four Masters, also in the Book of Leinster, compiled in the late 1150s, and again in the Book of Lecan, compiled by the MacFirbis about 1416. All connect it with the battle of Clontarf, without mentioning why it was built."

"Well, what is the mystery about it?" he queried. "What more natural than that the defeated Norsemen should rear a cairn above the body of some great chief who had fallen in the battle?"

"In the first place," I answered, "there is a mystery concerning the existence of it. The building of cairns above the dead was a Norse, not an Irish, custom. Yet according to the chroniclers, it was not Norsemen who reared this heap. How could they have built it immediately after the battle, in which they had been cut to pieces and driven in headlong flight through the gates of Dublin? Their chieftains lay where they had fallen and the ravens picked their bones. It was Irish hands that heaped these stones."

"Well, was that so strange?" persisted Ortali. "In old times the Irish heaped up stones before they went into battle, each man putting a stone in place; after the battle the living removed their stones, leaving in that manner a simple tally of the slain for any who wished to count the remaining stones."

I shook my head.

"That was in more ancient times; not in the battle of Clontarf. In the first place, there were more than twenty thousand warriors, and four thousand fell here; this cairn is not large enough to have served as a tally of the men killed in battle. And it is too symmetrically built. Hardly a stone has fallen away in all these centuries. No, it was reared to cover something."

"Nordic superstitions!" the man sneered again.

“Aye, superstitions if you will!” Fired by his scorn, I exclaimed so savagely that he involuntarily stepped back, his hand slipping inside his coat. “We of North Europe had gods and demons before which the pallid mythologies of the South fade to childishness. At a time when your ancestors were lolling on silken cushions among the crumbling marble pillars of a decaying civilization, my ancestors were building their own civilization in hardships and gigantic battles against foes human and inhuman.

“Here on this very plain the Dark Ages came to an end and the light of a new era dawned faintly on a world of hate and anarchy. Here, as even you know, in the year 1014, Brian Boru and his Dalcassian ax-wielders broke the power of the heathen Norsemen forever–those grim anarchistic plunderers who had held back the progress of civilization for centuries.

“It was more than a struggle between Gael and Dane for the crown of Ireland. It was a war between the White Christ and Odin, between Christian and pagan. It was the last stand of the heathen–of the people of the old, grim ways. For three hundred years the world had writhed beneath the heel of the Viking, and here on Clontarf that scourge was lifted forever.”

“Then, as now, the importance of that battle was underestimated by polite Latin and Latinized writers and historians. The polished sophisticates of the civilized cities of the South were not interested in the battles of barbarians in the remote northwestern corner of the world–a place and peoples of whose very names they were only vaguely aware. They only knew that suddenly the terrible raids of the sea kings ceased to sweep along their coasts, and in another century the wild age of plunder and slaughter had almost been forgotten–all because a rude, half-civilized people who scantily covered their nakedness with wolf hides rose up against the conquerors.

“Here was Ragnarok, the fall of the gods! Here in very truth Odin fell, for his religion was given its death blow. He was last of all the heathen gods to stand before Christianity, and it looked for a time as if his children might prevail and plunge the world back into darkness and savagery. Before Clontarf, legends say, he often appeared on earth to his worshipers, dimly seen in the smoke of the sacrifices where naked human victims died screaming, or riding the wind-torn clouds, his wild locks flying in the gale, or, appareled like a Norse warrior, dealing thunderous blows in the forefront

of nameless battles. But after Clontarf he was seen no more; his worshipers called on him in vain with wild chants and grim sacrifices.

They lost faith in him, who had failed them in their wildest hour; his altars crumbled, his priests turned gray and died, and men turned to his conqueror, the White Christ. The reign of blood and iron was forgotten; the age of the red-handed sea kings passed. The rising sun slowly, dimly, lighted the night of the Dark Ages, and men forgot Odin, who came no more on earth.

“Aye, laugh if you will! But who knows what shapes of horror have had birth in the darkness, the cold gloom, and the whistling black gulfs of the North? In the southern lands the sun shines and flowers blow; under the soft skies men laugh at demons. But in the North who can say what elemental spirits of evil dwell in the fierce storms and the darkness? Well may it be that from such fiends of the night men evolved the worship of the grim ones, Odin and Thor, and their terrible kin.”

Ortali was silent for an instant, as if taken aback by my vehemence; then he laughed. “Well said, my Northern philosopher! We will argue these questions another time. I could hardly expect a descendant of Nordic barbarians to escape some trace of the dreams and mysticism of his race. But you cannot expect me to be moved by your imaginings, either. I still believe that this cairn covers no grimmer secret than a Norse chief who fell in the battle–and really your ravings concerning Nordic devils have no bearing on the matter. Will you help me tear into this cairn?”

“No,” I answered shortly.

“A few hours’ work will suffice to lay bare whatever it may hide,” he continued as if he had not heard.

“By the way, speaking of superstitions, is there not some wild tale concerning holly connected with this heap?”

“An old legend says that all trees bearing holly were cut down for a league in all directions, for some mysterious reason,” I answered sullenly. “That’s another mystery. Holly was an important part of Norse magic-making. The Four Masters tell of a Norseman–a white-bearded ancient of wild aspect,

and apparently a priest of Odin–who was slain by the natives while attempting to lay a branch of holly on the cairn, a year after the battle."

"Well," he laughed, "I have procured a sprig of holly–see?–and shall wear it in my lapel; perhaps it will protect me against your Nordic devils. I feel more certain than ever that the cairn covers a sea king–and they were always laid to rest with all their riches: golden cups and jewel-set sword hilts and silver corselets. I feel that this cairn holds wealth, wealth over which clumsy-footed Irish peasants have been stumbling for centuries, living in want and dying in hunger. Bah! We shall return here at about midnight, when we may be fairly certain that we will not be interrupted–and you will aid me at the excavations."

The last sentence was rapped out in a tone that sent a red surge of blood-lust through my brain. Ortali turned and began examining the cairn as he spoke, and almost involuntarily my hand reached out stealthily and closed on a wicked bit of jagged stone that had become detached from one of the boulders. In that instant I was a potential murderer if ever one walked the earth. One blow, quick, silent and savage, and I would be free forever from a slavery bitter as my Celtic ancestors knew beneath the heels of the Vikings.

As if sensing my thoughts, Ortali wheeled to face me. I quickly slipped the stone into my pocket, not knowing whether he noted the action. But he must have seen the red killing instinct burning in my eyes, for again he recoiled and again his hand sought the hidden revolver.

But he only said: "I've changed my mind. We will not uncover the cairn tonight. To-morrow night perhaps. We may be spied upon. Just now I am going back to the hotel."

I made no reply, but turned my back upon him and stalked moodily away in the direction of the shore.

He started up the slope of the headland beyond which lay the city, and when I turned to look at him, he was just crossing the ridge, etched clearly against the hazy sky. If hate could kill, he would have dropped dead. I saw him in a red-tinged haze, and the pulses in my temples throbbed like hammers.

I turned back toward the shore, and stopped suddenly. Engrossed with my own dark thoughts, I had approached within a few feet of a woman before seeing her. She was tall and strongly made, with a strong stern face, deeply lined and weather-worn as the hills. She was dressed in a manner strange to me, but I thought little of it, knowing the curious styles of clothing worn by backward people.

“What would you be doing at the cairn?” she asked in a deep, powerful voice. I looked at her in surprise; she spoke in Gaelic, which was not strange of itself, but the Gaelic she used I had supposed was extinct as a spoken language: it was the Gaelic of scholars, pure, and with a distinctly archaic flavor. A woman from some secluded hill country, I thought, where the people still spoke the unadulterated tongue of their ancestors.

“We were speculating on its mystery,” I answered in the same tongue, hesitantly, however, for though skilled in the more modern form taught in the schools, to match her use of the language was a strain on my knowledge of it. She shook her head slowly. “I like not the dark man who was with you,” she said somberly. “Who are you?”

“I am an American,” I answered. “My name is James O’Brien.”

A strange light gleamed in her cold eyes.

“O’Brien? You are of my clan. I was born an O’Brien. I married a man of the MacDonnals, but my heart was ever with the folk of my blood.”

“You live hereabouts?” I queried, my mind on her unusual accent.

“Aye, I lived here upon a time,” she answered, “but I have been far away for a long time. All is changed–changed. I would not have returned, but I was drawn back by a call you would not understand.

Tell me, would you open the cairn?”

I started and gazed at her closely, deciding that she had somehow overheard our conversation.

“It is not mine to say,” I answered bitterly. “Ortali–my companion–he will doubtless open it and I am constrained to aid him. Of my own will I would not molest it.”

Her cold eyes bored into my soul.

“Fools rush blind to their doom,” she said somberly. “What does this man know of the mysteries of this ancient land? Deeds have been done here whereof the world reechoed. Yonder, in the long ago, when Tomar’s Wood rose dark and rustling against the plain of Clontarf, and the Danish walls of Dublin loomed south of the river Liffey, the ravens fed on the slain and the setting sun lighted lakes of crimson.

There King Brian, your ancestor and mine, broke the spears of the North. From all lands they came, and from the isles of the sea; they came in gleaming mail and their horned helmets cast long shadows across the land. Their dragon-prows thronged the waves and the sound of their oars was as the beat of a storm.

“On yonder plain the heroes fell like ripe wheat before the reaper. There fell Jarl Sigurd of the Orkneys, and Brodir of Man, last of the sea kings, and all their chiefs. There fell, too, Prince Murrogh and his son Turlogh, and many chieftains of the Gael, and King Brian Boru himself, Erin’s mightiest monarch.”

“True!” My imagination was always fired by the epic tales of the land of my ancestors. “Blood of mine was spilled here, and, though I was born in a far land, there are ties of blood to bind my soul to this shore.”

She nodded slowly, and from beneath her robes drew forth something that sparkled dully in the setting sun.

“Take this,” she said. “As a token of blood tie, I give it to you. I feel the weird of strange and monstrous happenings–but this will keep you safe from evil and the people of the night. Beyond reckoning of man, it is holy.”

I took it, wonderingly. It was a crucifix of curiously worked gold, set with tiny jewels. The workmanship was extremely archaic and unmistakably

Celtic. And vaguely within me stirred a memory of a long-lost relic described by forgotten monks in dim manuscripts.

“Great heavens!” I exclaimed. “This is–this must be–this can be nothing less than the lost crucifix of Saint Brandon the Blessed!”

“Aye.” She inclined her grim head. “Saint Brandon’s cross, fashioned by the hands of the holy man in long ago, before the Norse barbarians made Erin a red hell–in the days when a golden peace and holiness ruled the land.”

“But, woman!” I exclaimed wildly, “I cannot accept this as a gift from you! You cannot know its value!

Its intrinsic worth alone is equal to a fortune; as a relic it is priceless–”

“Enough!” Her deep voice struck me suddenly silent. “Have done with such talk, which is sacrilege. The cross of Saint Brandon is beyond price. It was never stained with gold; only as a free gift has it ever changed hands. I give it to you to shield you against the powers of evil. Say no more.”

“But it has been lost for three hundred years!” I exclaimed. “How–where…?”

“A holy man gave it to me long ago,” she answered. “I hid it in my bosom–long it lay in my bosom. But now I give it to you; I have come from a far country to give it to you, for there are monstrous happenings in the wind, and it is sword and shield against the people of the night. An ancient evil stirs in its prison, which blind hands of folly may break open; but stronger than any evil is the cross of Saint Brandon which has gathered power and strength through the long, long ages since that forgotten evil fell to the earth.”

“But who are you?” I exclaimed.

“I am Meve MacDonnal,” she answered.

Then, turning without a word, she strode away in the deepening twilight while I stood bewildered and watched her cross the headland and pass from

sight, turning inland as she topped the ridge. Then I, too, shaking myself like a man waking from a dream, went slowly up the slope and across the headland.

When I crossed the ridge it was as if I had passed out of one world into another: behind me lay the wilderness and desolation of a weird medieval age; before me pulsed the lights and the roar of modern Dublin. Only one archaic touch was lent to the scene before me: some distance inland loomed the straggling and broken lines of an ancient graveyard, long deserted and grown up in weeds, barely discernible in the dusk. As I looked I saw a tall figure moving ghostily among the crumbling tombs, and I shook my head bewilderedly. Surely Meve MacDonnal was touched with madness, living in the past, like one seeking to stir to flame the ashes of dead yesterdays. I set out toward where, in the near distance, began the straggling window-gleams that grew into the swarming ocean of lights that was Dublin.

Back at the suburban hotel where Ortali and I had our rooms, I did not speak to him of the cross the woman had given me. In that at least he should not share. I intended keeping it until she requested its return, which I felt sure she would do. Now as I recalled her appearance, the strangeness of her costume returned to me, with one item which had impressed itself on my subconscious mind at the time, but which I had not consciously realized. Meve MacDonnal had been wearing sandals of a type not worn in Ireland for centuries. Well, it was perhaps natural that with her retrospective nature she should imitate the apparel of the past ages which seemed to claim all her thoughts.

I turned the cross reverently in my hands. There was no doubt that it was the very cross for which antiquarians had searched so long in vain, and at last in despair had denied the existence of. The priestly scholar, Michael O’Rourke, in a treatise written about 1690, described the relic at length, chronicled its history exhaustively and maintained that it was last heard of in the possession of Bishop Liam O’Brien, who, dying in 1595, gave it into the keeping of a kinswoman; but who this woman was, it was never known, and O’Rourke maintained that she kept her possession of the cross a secret, and that it was laid away with her in her tomb.

At another time my elation at discovering this relic would have been extreme, but, at the time, my mind was too filled with hate and smoldering fury. Replacing the cross in my pocket, I fell moodily to reviewing my connections with Ortali, connections which puzzled my friends, but which were simple enough.

Some years before I had been connected with a certain large university in a humble way. One of the professors with whom I worked–a man named Reynolds–was of intolerably overbearing disposition toward those whom he considered his inferiors. I was a poverty-ridden student striving for life in a system which makes the very existence of a scholar precarious. I bore Professor Reynolds' abuse as long as I could, but one day we clashed. The reason does not matter; it was trivial enough in itself. Because I dared reply to his insults, Reynolds struck me and I knocked him senseless.

That very day he caused my dismissal from the university. Facing not only an abrupt termination of my work and studies, but actual starvation, I was reduced to desperation, and I went to Reynolds' study late that night intending to thrash him within an inch of his life. I found him alone in his study, but the moment I entered, he sprang up and rushed at me like a wild beast, with a dagger he used for a paperweight. I did not strike him; I did not even touch him. As I stepped aside to avoid his rush, a small rug slipped beneath his charging feet. He fell headlong and, to my horror, in his fall the dagger in his hand was driven into his heart. He died instantly. I was at once aware of my position. I was known to have quarreled, and even exchanged blows with the man. I had every reason to hate him. If I were found in the study with the dead man, no jury in the world would not believe that I had murdered him. I hurriedly left by the way I had come, thinking that I had been unobserved. But Ortali, the dead man's secretary, had seen me. Returning from a dance, he had observed me entering the premises, and, following me, had seen the whole affair through the window. But this I did not know until later.

The body was found by the professor's housekeeper, and naturally there was a great stir. Suspicion pointed to me, but lack of evidence kept me from being indicted, and this same lack of evidence brought about a verdict of suicide. All this time Ortali had kept quiet. Now he came to me and

disclosed what he knew. He knew, of course, that I had not killed Reynolds, but he could prove that I was in the study when the professor met his death, and I knew Ortali was capable of carrying out his threat of swearing that he had seen me murder Reynolds in cold blood. And thus began a systematic blackmail.

I venture to say that a stranger blackmail was never levied. I had no money then; Ortali was gambling on my future, for he was assured of my abilities. He advanced me money, and, by clever wire-pulling, got me an appointment in a large college. Then he sat back to reap the benefits of his scheming, and he reaped full fold of the seed he sowed. In my line I became eminently successful. I soon commanded an enormous salary in my regular work, and I received rich prizes and awards for researches of various difficult nature, and of these Ortali took the lion's share–in money at least. I seemed to have the Midas touch. Yet of the wine of my success I tasted only the dregs.

I scarcely had a cent to my name. The money that had flowed through my hands had gone to enrich my slaver, unknown to the world. A man of remarkable gifts, he could have gone to the heights in any line, but for a queer streak in him, which, coupled with an inordinately avaricious nature, made him a parasite, a blood-sucking leech.

This trip to Dublin had been in the nature of a vacation for me. I was worn out with study and labor. But he had somehow heard of Grimmin's Cairn, as it was called, and, like a vulture that scents dead flesh, he conceived himself on the track of hidden gold. A golden wine cup would have been, to him, sufficient reward for the labor of tearing into the pile, and reason enough for desecrating or even destroying the ancient landmark. He was a swine whose only god was gold.

Well, I thought grimly, as I disrobed for bed, all things end, both good and bad. Such a life as I had lived was unbearable. Ortali had dangled the gallows before my eyes until it had lost its terrors. I had staggered beneath the load I carried because of my love for my work. But all human endurance has its limits. My hands turned to iron as I thought of Ortali, working beside me at midnight at the lonely cairn.

One stroke, with such a stone as I had caught up that day, and my agony would be ended. That life and hopes and career and ambitions would be ended as well, could not be helped. Ah, what a sorry, sorry end to all my high dreams! When a rope and the long drop through the black trap should cut short an honorable career and a useful life! And all because of a human vampire who feasted his rotten lust on my soul, and drove me to murder and ruin.

But I knew my fate was written in the iron books of doom. Sooner or later I would turn on Ortali and kill him, be the consequences what they might. And I had reached the end of my road. Continual torture had rendered me, I believe, partly insane. I knew that at Grimmin's Cairn, when we toiled at midnight, Ortali's life would end beneath my hands, and my own life be cast away.

Something fell out of my pocket and I picked it up. It was the piece of sharp stone I had caught up off the cairn. Looking at it moodily, I wondered what strange hands had touched it in old times, and what grim secret it helped to hide on the bare headland of Grimmin. I switched out the light and lay in the darkness, the stone still in my hand, forgotten, occupied with my own dark broodings. And I glided gradually into deep slumber.

At first I was aware that I was dreaming, as people often are. All was dim and vague, and connected in some strange way, I realized, with the bit of stone still grasped in my sleeping hand. Gigantic, chaotic scenes and landscapes and events shifted before me, like clouds that rolled and tumbled before a gale.

Slowly these settled and crystallized into one distinct landscape, familiar and yet wildly strange. I saw a broad bare plain, fringed by the gray sea on one side, and a dark, rustling forest on the other; this plain was cut by a winding river, and beyond this river I saw a city–such a city as my waking eyes had never seen: bare, stark, massive, with the grim architecture of an earlier, wilder age. On the plain I saw, as in a mist, a mighty battle. Serried ranks rolled backward and forward, steel flashed like a sunlit sea, and men fell like ripe wheat beneath the blades. I saw men in wolfskins, wild and shock-headed, wielding dripping axes, and tall men in horned helmets and glittering mail, whose eyes were cold and blue as the sea. And I saw myself.

Yes, in my dream I saw and recognized, in a semi-detached way, myself. I was tall and rangily powerful; I was shock-headed and naked but for a wolf hide girt about my loins. I ran among the ranks yelling and smiting with a red ax, and blood ran down my flanks from wounds I scarcely felt. My eyes were cold blue and my shaggy hair and beard were red.

Now for an instant I was cognizant of my dual personality, aware that I was at once the wild man who ran and smote with the gory ax, and the man who slumbered and dreamed across the centuries. But this sensation quickly faded. I was no longer aware of any personality other than that of the barbarian who ran and smote. James O'Brien had no existence; I was Red Cumal, kern of Brian Boru, and my ax was dripping with the blood of my foes.

The roar of conflict was dying away, though here and there struggling clumps of warriors still dotted the plain. Down along the river half-naked tribesmen, waist-deep in reddening water, tore and slashed with helmeted warriors whose mail could not save them from the stroke of the Dalcassian ax. Across the river a bloody, disorderly horde was staggering through the gates of Dublin.

The sun was sinking low toward the horizon. All day I had fought beside the chiefs. I had seen Jarl Sigurd fall beneath Prince Murrogh's sword. I had seen Murrogh himself die in the moment of victory, by the hand of a grim mailed giant whose name none knew. I had seen, in the flight of the enemy, Brodir and King Brian fall together at the door of the great king's tent.

Aye, it had been a feasting of ravens, a red flood of slaughter, and I knew that no more would the dragon-prowed fleets sweep from the blue North with torch and destruction. Far and wide the Vikings lay in their glittering mail, as the ripe wheat lies after the reaping. Among them lay thousands of bodies clad in the wolf hides of the tribes, but the dead of the Northern people far outnumbered the dead of Erin. I was weary and sick of the stench of raw blood. I had glutted my soul with slaughter; now I sought plunder. And I found it–on the corpse of a richly-clad Norse chief which lay close to the seashore. I tore off the silver-scaled corselet, the horned helmet. They fitted as if made for me, and I swaggered among the dead, calling on my

wild comrades to admire my appearance, though the harness felt strange to me, for the Gaels scorned armor and fought half-naked.

In my search for loot I had wandered far out on the plain, away from the river, but still the mail-clad bodies lay thickly strewn, for the bursting of the ranks had scattered fugitives and pursuers all over the countryside, from the dark waving Wood of Tomar, to the river and the seashore. And on the seaward slope of Drumna's headland, out of sight of the city and the plain of Clontarf, I came suddenly upon a dying warrior. He was tall and massive, clad in gray mail. He lay partly in the folds of a great dark cloak, and his sword lay broken near his mighty right hand. His horned helmet had fallen from his head and his elf-locks blew in the wind that swept out of the west.

Where one eye should have been was an empty socket and the other eye glittered cold and grim as the North Sea, though it was glazing with the approach of death. Blood oozed from a rent in his corselet. I approached him warily, a strange cold fear, that I could not understand, gripping me. Ax ready to dash out his brains, I bent over him, and recognized him as the chief who had slain Prince Murrogh, and who had mown down the warriors of the Gael like a harvest. Wherever he had fought, the Norsemen had prevailed, but in all other parts of the field, the Gaels had been irresistible.

And now he spoke to me in Norse and I understood, for had I not toiled as slave among the sea people for long bitter years?

"The Christians have overcome," he gasped in a voice whose timbre, though low-pitched, sent a curious shiver of fear through me; there was in it an undertone as of icy waves sweeping along a Northern shore, as of freezing winds whispering among the pine trees. "Doom and shadows stalk on Asgaard and here has fallen Ragnarok. I could not be in all parts of the field at once, and now I am wounded unto death. A spear–a spear with a cross carved in the blade; no other weapon could wound me."

I realized that the chief, seeing mistily my red beard and the Norse armor I wore, supposed me to be one of his own race. But a crawling horror surged darkly in the depths of my soul.

“White Christ, thou hast not yet conquered,” he muttered deliriously. “Lift me up, man, and let me speak to you.”

Now for some reason I complied, and as I lifted him to a sitting posture, I shuddered and my flesh crawled at the feel of him, for his flesh was like ivory–smoother and harder than is natural for human flesh, and colder than even a dying man should be.

“I die as men die,” he muttered. “Fool, to assume the attributes of mankind, even though it was to aid the people who deify me. The gods are immortal, but flesh can perish, even when it clothes a god. Haste and bring a sprig of the magic plant–even holly–and lay it on my bosom. Aye, though it be no larger than a dagger point, it will free me from this fleshly prison I put on when I came to war with men with their own weapons. And I will shake off this flesh and stalk once more among the thundering clouds. Woe, then, to all men who bend not the knee to me! Haste; I will await your coming.”

His lionlike head fell back, and feeling shudderingly under his corselet, I could distinguish no heartbeat.

He was dead, as men die, but I knew that locked in that semblance of a human body, there but slumbered the spirit of a fiend of the frost and darkness.

Aye, I knew him: Odin, the Gray Man, the One-eyed, the god of the North who had taken the form of a warrior to fight for his people. Assuming the form of a human he was subject to many of the limitations of humanity. All men knew this of the gods, who often walked the earth in the guise of men. Odin, clothed in human semblance, could be wounded by certain weapons, and even slain, but a touch of the mysterious holly would rouse him in grisly resurrection. This task he had set me, not knowing me for an enemy; in human form he could only use human faculties, and these had been impaired by onstriding death.

My hair stood up and my flesh crawled. I tore from my body the Norse armor, and fought a wild panic that prompted me to run blind and screaming with terror across the plain. Nauseated with fear, I gathered boulders and heaped them for a rude couch, and on it, shaking with horror, I

lifted the body of the Norse god. And as the sun set and the stars came silently out, I was working with fierce energy, piling huge rocks above the corpse. Other tribesmen came up and I told them of what I was sealing up–I hoped forever. And they, shivering with horror, fell to aiding me. No sprig of magic holly should be laid on Odin's terrible bosom. Beneath these rude stones the Northern demon should slumber until the thunder of Judgment Day, forgotten by the world which had once cried out beneath his iron heel. Yet not wholly forgot, for, as we labored, one of my comrades said: "This shall be no longer Drumna's Headland, but the Headland of the Gray Man."

That phrase established a connection between my dream-self and my sleeping self. I started up from sleep exclaiming: "Gray Man's Headland!"

I looked about dazedly, the furnishings of the room, faintly lighted by the starlight in the windows, seeming strange and unfamiliar until I slowly oriented myself with time and space.

"Gray Man's Headland," I repeated. "Gray Man–Graymin–Grimmin–*Grimmin's Headland!* Great God, the thing under the cairn!"

Shaken, I sprang up, and realized that I still gripped the piece of stone from the cairn. It is well known that inanimate objects retain psychic associations. A round stone from the plain of Jericho has been placed in the hand of a hypnotized medium, and she has at once reconstructed in her mind the battle and siege of the city, and the shattering fall of the walls. I did not doubt that this bit of stone had acted as a magnet to drag my modern mind through the mists of the centuries into a life I had known before.

I was more shaken than I can describe, for the whole fantastic affair fitted in too well with certain formless vague sensations concerning the cairn which had already lingered at the back of my mind, to be dismissed as an unusually vivid dream. I felt the need of a glass of wine, and remembered that Ortali always had wine in his room. I hurriedly donned my clothes, opened my door, crossed the corridor and was about to knock at Ortali's door, when I noticed that it was partly open, as if some one had neglected to close it carefully. I entered, switching on a light. The room was empty.

I realized what had occurred. Ortali mistrusted me; he feared to risk himself alone with me in a lonely spot at midnight. He had postponed the visit to the cairn merely to trick me, to give him a chance to slip away alone.

My hatred for Ortali was for the moment completely submerged by a wild panic of horror at the thought of what the opening of the cairn might result in. For I did not doubt the authenticity of my dream. It was no dream; it was a fragmentary bit of memory, in which I had relived that other life of mine. Gray Man's Headland–Grimmin's Headland, and under those rough stones that grisly corpse in its semblance of humanity–I could not hope that, imbued with the imperishable essence of an elemental spirit, that corpse had crumbled to dust in the ages.

Of my race out of the city and across those semi-desolate reaches, I remember little. The night was a cloak of horror through which peered red stars like the gloating eyes of uncanny beasts, and my footfalls echoed hollowly so that repeatedly I thought some monster loped at my heels.

The straggling lights fell away behind me and I entered the region of mystery and horror. No wonder that progress had passed to the right and to the left of this spot, leaving it untouched, a blind back-eddy given over to goblin-dreams and nightmare memories. Well that so few suspected its very existence.

Dimly I saw the headland, but fear gripped me and held me aloof. I had a vague, incoherent idea of finding the ancient woman, Meve MacDonnal. She was grown old in the mysteries and traditions of the mysterious land. She could aid me, if indeed the blind fool Ortali loosed on the world the forgotten demon men once worshiped in the North.

A figure loomed suddenly in the starlight and I caromed against him, almost upsetting him. A stammering voice in a thick brogue protested with the petulancy of intoxication. It was a burly longshoreman returning to his cottage, no doubt, from some late revel in a tavern. I seized him and shook him, my eyes glaring wildly in the starlight.

"I am looking for Meve MacDonnal! Do you know her? Tell me, you fool! Do you know old Meve MacDonnal?"

It was as if my words sobered him as suddenly as a dash of icy water in his face. In the starlight I saw his face glimmer whitely and a catch of fear was at his throat. He sought to cross himself with an uncertain hand.

“Meve MacDonnal? Are ye mad? What would ye be doin’ with *her*?”

“Tell me!” I shrieked, shaking him savagely. “Where is Meve MacDonnal?”

“There!” he gasped, pointing with a shaking hand where dimly in the night something loomed against the shadows. “In the name of the holy saints, begone, be ye madman or devil, and l’ave an honest man alone! There–there ye’ll find Meve MacDonnal–where they laid her, full three hundred years ago!”

Half-heeding his words I flung him aside with a fierce exclamation, and, as I raced across the weed-grown plain, I heard the sounds of his lumbering flight. Half blind with panic, I came to the low structures the man had pointed out. And floundering deep in weeds, my feet sinking into musty mold, I realized with a shock that I was in the ancient graveyard on the inland side of Grimmin’s Headland, into which I had seen Meve MacDonnal disappear the evening before. I was close by the door of the largest tomb, and with an eerie premonition I leaned close, seeking to make out the deeply-carven inscription.

And partly by the dim light of the stars and partly by the touch of my tracing fingers, I made out the words and figures, in the half-forgotten Gaelic of three centuries ago: “Meve MacDonnal–1565–1640.”

With a cry of horror I recoiled and, snatching out the crucifix she had given me, made to hurl it into the darkness–but it was as if an invisible hand caught my wrist. Madness and insanity–but I could not doubt: Meve MacDonnal had come to me from the tomb wherein she had rested for three hundred years to give me the ancient, ancient relic entrusted to her so long ago by her priestly kin. The memory of her words came to me, and the memory of Ortali and the Gray Man. From a lesser horror I turned squarely to a greater, and ran swiftly toward the headland which loomed dimly against the stars toward the sea.

As I crossed the ridge I saw, in the starlight, the cairn, and the figure that toiled gnomelike above it.

Ortali, with his accustomed, almost superhuman energy, had dislodged many of the boulders; and as I approached, shaking with horrified anticipation, I saw him tear aside the last layer, and I heard his savage cry of triumph, that froze me in my tracks some yards behind him, looking down from the slope. An unholy radiance rose from the cairn, and I saw, in the north, the aurora flame up suddenly with terrible beauty, paling the starlight. All about the cairn pulsed a weird light, turning the rough stones to a cold shimmering silver, and in this glow I saw Ortali, all heedless, cast aside his pick and lean gloatingly over the aperture he had made–and I saw there the helmeted head, reposing on the couch of stones where I, Red Cumal, placed it so long ago. I saw the inhuman terror and beauty of that awesome carven face, in which was neither human weakness, pity nor mercy. I saw the soul-freezing glitter of the one eye, which stared wide open in a fearful semblance of life. All up and down the tall mailed figure shimmered and sparkled cold darts and gleams of icy light, like the northern lights that blazed in the shuddering skies.

Aye, the Gray Man lay as I had left him more than nine hundred years before, without a trace of rust or rot or decay.

And now as Ortali leaned forward to examine his find, a gasping cry broke from my lips–for the sprig of holly worn in his lapel in defiance of “Nordic superstition” slipped from its place, and in the weird glow I plainly saw it fall upon the mighty mailed breast of the figure, where it blazed suddenly with a brightness too dazzling for human eyes. My cry was echoed by Ortali. The figure moved; the mighty limbs flexed, tumbling the shining stones aside. A new gleam lighted the terrible eye and a tide of life flooded and animated the carven features.

Out of the cairn he rose, and the northern lights played terribly about him. And the Gray Man changed and altered in horrific transmutation. The human features faded like a fading mask; the armor fell from his body and crumbled to dust as it fell; and the fiendish spirit of ice and frost and darkness that the sons of the North deified as Odin, stood up nakedly and terribly in the stars. About his grisly head played lightnings and the

shuddering gleams of the aurora. His towering anthropomorphic form was dark as shadow and gleaming as ice; his horrible crest reared colossally against the vaulting arch of the sky.

Ortali cowered, screaming wordlessly, as the taloned malformed hands reached for him. In the shadowy indescribable features of the Thing there was no tinge of gratitude toward the man who had released it–only a demoniac gloating and a demoniac hate for all the sons of men. I saw the shadowy arms shoot out and strike. I heard Ortali scream once–a single unbearable screech that broke short at the shrillest pitch. A single instant a blinding blue glare burst about him, lighting his convulsed features and his upward-rolling eyes; then his body was dashed earthward as by an electric shock, so savagely that I distinctly heard the splintering of his bones. But Ortali was dead before he touched the ground–dead, shriveled and blackened, exactly like a man blasted by a thunderbolt, to which cause, indeed, men later ascribed his death.

The slavering monster that had slain him lumbered now toward me, shadowy tentacle-like arms outspread, the pale starlight making a luminous pool of his great inhuman eye, his frightful talons dripping with I know not what elemental forces to blast the bodies and souls of men.

But I flinched not, and in that instant I feared him not, neither the horror of his countenance nor the threat of his thunderbolt dooms. For in a blinding white flame had come to me the realization of why Meve MacDonnal had come from her tomb to bring me the ancient cross which had lain in her bosom for three hundred years, gathering unto itself unseen forces of good and light, which war forever against the shapes of lunacy and shadow.

As I plucked from my garments the ancient cross, I felt the play of gigantic unseen forces in the air about me. I was but a pawn in the game–merely the hand that held the relic of holiness, that was the symbol of the powers opposed forever against the fiends of darkness. As I held it high, from it shot a single shaft of white light, unbearably pure, unbearably white, as if all the awesome forces of Light were combined in the symbol and loosed in one concentrated arrow of wrath against the monster of darkness. And with a hideous shriek the demon reeled back, shriveling before my eyes. Then with a great rush of vulturelike wings, he soared into the stars, dwindling,

dwindling among the play of the flaming fires and the lights of the haunted skies, fleeing back into the dark limbo which gave him birth, God only knows how many grisly eons ago.

Worms of the Earth

“Strike in the nails, soldiers, and let our guest see the reality of our good Roman justice!”

The speaker wrapped his purple cloak closer about his powerful frame and settled back into his official chair, much as he might have settled back in his seat at the Circus Maximus to enjoy the clash of gladiatorial swords. Realization of power colored his every move. Whetted pride was necessary to Roman satisfaction, and Titus Sulla was justly proud; for he was military governor of Eboracum and answerable only to the emperor of Rome. He was a strongly built man of medium height, with the hawk-like features of the pure-bred Roman. Now a mocking smile curved his full lips, increasing the arrogance of his haughty aspect. Distinctly military in appearance, he wore the golden-scaled corselet and chased breastplate of his rank, with the short stabbing sword at his belt, and he held on his knee the silvered helmet with its plumed crest. Behind him stood a clump of impassive soldiers with shield and spear–blond titans from the Rhineland.

Before him was taking place the scene which apparently gave him so much real gratification–a scene common enough wherever stretched the far-flung boundaries of Rome. A rude cross lay flat upon the barren earth and on it was bound a man–half naked, wild of aspect with his corded limbs, glaring eyes and shock of tangled hair. His executioners were Roman soldiers, and with heavy hammers they prepared to pin the victim’s hands and feet to the wood with iron spikes.

Only a small group of men watched this ghastly scene, in the dread place of execution beyond the city walls: the governor and his watchful guards; a few young Roman officers; the man to whom Sulla had referred as “guest” and who stood like a bronze image, unspeaking. Beside the gleaming splendor of the Roman, the quiet garb of this man seemed drab, almost somber.

He was dark, but he did not resemble the Latins around him. There was about him none of the warm, almost Oriental sensuality of the Mediterranean which colored their features. The blond barbarians behind Sulla's chair were less unlike the man in facial outline than were the Romans. Not his were the full curving red lips, nor the rich waving locks suggestive of the Greek. Nor was his dark complexion the rich olive of the south; rather it was the bleak darkness of the north. The whole aspect of the man vaguely suggested the shadowed mists, the gloom, the cold and the icy winds of the naked northern lands. Even his black eyes were savagely cold, like black fires burning through fathoms of ice.

His height was only medium but there was something about him which transcended mere physical bulk–a certain fierce innate vitality, comparable only to that of a wolf or a panther. In every line of his supple, compact body, as well as in his coarse straight hair and thin lips, this was evident–in the hawk-like set of the head on the corded neck, in the broad square shoulders, in the deep chest, the lean loins, the narrow feet. Built with the savage economy of a panther, he was an image of dynamic potentialities, pent in with iron self-control.

At his feet crouched one like him in complexion–but there the resemblance ended. This other was a stunted giant, with gnarly limbs, thick body, a low sloping brow and an expression of dull ferocity, now clearly mixed with fear. If the man on the cross resembled, in a tribal way, the man Titus Sulla called guest, he far more resembled the stunted crouching giant.

"Well, Partha Mac Othna," said the governor with studied effrontery, "when you return to your tribe, you will have a tale to tell of the justice of Rome, who rules the south."

"I will have a tale," answered the other in a voice which betrayed no emotion, just as his dark face, schooled to immobility, showed no evidence of the maelstrom in his soul.

"Justice to all under the rule of Rome," said Sulla. "Pax Romana! Reward for virtue, punishment for wrong!" He laughed inwardly at his own black hypocrisy, then continued: "You see, emissary of Pictland, how swiftly Rome punishes the transgressor."

“I see,” answered the Pict in a voice which strongly-curbed anger made deep with menace, “that the subject of a foreign king is dealt with as though he were a Roman slave.”

“He has been tried and condemned in an unbiased court,” retorted Sulla.

“Aye! and the accuser was a Roman, the witnesses Roman, the judge Roman! He committed murder? In a moment of fury he struck down a Roman merchant who cheated, tricked and robbed him, and to injury added insult–aye, and a blow! Is his king but a dog, that Rome crucifies his subjects at will, condemned by Roman courts? Is his king too weak or foolish to do justice, were he informed and formal charges brought against the offender?”

“Well,” said Sulla cynically, “you may inform Bran Mak Morn yourself. Rome, my friend, makes no account of her actions to barbarian kings. When savages come among us, let them act with discretion or suffer the consequences.”

The Pict shut his iron jaws with a snap that told Sulla further badgering would elicit no reply. The Roman made a gesture to the executioners. One of them seized a spike and placing it against the thick wrist of the victim, smote heavily. The iron point sank deep through the flesh, crunching against the bones. The lips of the man on the cross writhed, though no moan escaped him. As a trapped wolf fights against his cage, the bound victim instinctively wrenched and struggled. The veins swelled in his temples, sweat beaded his low forehead, the muscles in arms and legs writhed and knotted. The hammers fell in inexorable strokes, driving the cruel points deeper and deeper, through wrists and ankles; blood flowed in a black river over the hands that held the spikes, staining the wood of the cross, and the splintering of bones was distinctly heard. Yet the sufferer made no outcry, though his blackened lips writhed back until the gums were visible, and his shaggy head jerked involuntarily from side to side.

The man called Partha Mac Othna stood like an iron image, eyes burning from an inscrutable face, his whole body hard as iron from the tension of his control. At his feet crouched his misshapen servant, hiding his face from the grim sight, his arms locked about his master’s knees. Those arms

gripped like steel and under his breath the fellow mumbled ceaselessly as if in invocation.

The last stroke fell; the cords were cut from arm and leg, so that the man would hang supported by the nails alone. He had ceased his struggling that only twisted the spikes in his agonizing wounds. His bright black eyes, unglazed, had not left the face of the man called Partha Mac Othna; in them lingered a desperate shadow of hope. Now the soldiers lifted the cross and set the end of it in the hole prepared, stamped the dirt about it to hold it erect. The Pict hung in midair, suspended by the nails in his flesh, but still no sound escaped his lips. His eyes still hung on the somber face of the emissary, but the shadow of hope was fading.

“He’ll live for days!” said Sulla cheerfully. “These Picts are harder than cats to kill! I’ll keep a guard of ten soldiers watching night and day to see that no one takes him down before he dies. Ho, there, Valerius, in honor of our esteemed neighbor, King Bran Mak Morn, give him a cup of wine!”

With a laugh the young officer came forward, holding a brimming wine-cup, and rising on his toes, lifted it to the parched lips of the sufferer. In the black eyes flared a red wave of unquenchable hatred; writhing his head aside to avoid even touching the cup, he spat full into the young Roman’s eyes. With a curse Valerius dashed the cup to the ground, and before any could halt him, wrenched out his sword and sheathed it in the man’s body.

Sulla rose with an imperious exclamation of anger; the man called Partha Mac Othna had started violently, but he bit his lip and said nothing. Valerius seemed somewhat surprized at himself, as he sullenly cleansed his sword. The act had been instinctive, following the insult to Roman pride, the one thing unbearable.

“Give up your sword, young sir!” exclaimed Sulla. “Centurion Publius, place him under arrest. A few days in a cell with stale bread and water will teach you to curb your patrician pride, in matters dealing with the will of the empire. What, you young fool, do you not realize that you could not have made the dog a more kindly gift? Who would not rather desire a quick death on the sword than the slow agony on the cross? Take him away. And you, centurion, see that guards remain at the cross so that the body is not cut

down until the ravens pick bare the bones. Partha Mac Othna, I go to a banquet at the house of Demetrius–will you not accompany me?”

The emissary shook his head, his eyes fixed on the limp form which sagged on the black-stained cross.

He made no reply. Sulla smiled sardonically, then rose and strode away, followed by his secretary who bore the gilded chair ceremoniously, and by the stolid soldiers, with whom walked Valerius, head sunken.

The man called Partha Mac Othna flung a wide fold of his cloak about his shoulder, halted a moment to gaze at the grim cross with its burden, darkly etched against the crimson sky, where the clouds of night were gathering. Then he stalked away, followed by his silent servant.

II

In an inner chamber of Eboracum, the man called Partha Mac Othna paced tigerishly to and fro. His sandalled feet made no sound on the marble tiles.

“Grom!” he turned to the gnarled servant, “well I know why you held my knees so tightly–why you muttered aid of the Moon-Woman–you feared I would lose my self-control and make a mad attempt to succor that poor wretch. By the gods, I believe that was what the dog Roman wished–his iron-cased watch-dogs watched me narrowly, I know, and his baiting was harder to bear than ordinarily.

“Gods black and white, dark and light!” he shook his clenched fists above his head in the black gust of his passion. “That I should stand by and see a man of mine butchered on a Roman cross–without justice and with no more trial than that farce! Black gods of R’lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of those butchers! I swear by the Nameless Ones, men shall die howling for that deed, and Rome shall cry out as a woman in the dark who treads upon an adder!”

“He knew you, master,” said Grom.

The other dropped his head and covered his eyes with a gesture of savage pain.

“His eyes will haunt me when I lie dying. Aye, he knew me, and almost until the last, I read in his eyes the hope that I might aid him. Gods and devils, is Rome to butcher my people beneath my very eyes? Then I am not king but dog!”

“Not so loud, in the name of all the gods!” exclaimed Grom in affright. “Did these Romans suspect you were Bran Mak Morn, they would nail you on a cross beside that other.”

“They will know it ere long,” grimly answered the king. “Too long I have lingered here in the guise of an emissary, spying upon mine enemies. They have thought to play with me, these Romans, masking their contempt and scorn only under polished satire. Rome is courteous to barbarian ambassadors, they give us fine houses to live in, offer us slaves, pander to our lusts with women and gold and wine and games, but all the while they laugh at us; their very courtesy is an insult, and sometimes–as today–their contempt discards all veneer. Bah! I’ve seen through their baitings–have remained imperturbably serene and swallowed their studied insults. But this–by the fiends of Hell, this is beyond human endurance! My people look to me; if I fail them–if I fail even one–even the lowest of my people, who will aid them? To whom shall they turn? By the gods, I’ll answer the gibes of these Roman dogs with black shaft and trenchant steel!”

“And the chief with the plumes?” Grom meant the governor and his gutturals thrummed with the blood-lust. “He dies?” He flicked out a length of steel.

Bran scowled. “Easier said than done. He dies–but how may I reach him? By day his German guards keep at his back; by night they stand at door and window. He has many enemies, Romans as well as barbarians. Many a Briton would gladly slit his throat.”

Grom seized Bran’s garment, stammering as fierce eagerness broke the bonds of his inarticulate nature.

“Let me go, master! My life is worth nothing. I will cut him down in the midst of his warriors!”

Bran smiled fiercely and clapped his hand on the stunted giant’s shoulder with a force that would have felled a lesser man.

“Nay, old war-dog, I have too much need of thee! You shall not throw your life away uselessly. Sulla would read the intent in your eyes, besides, and the javelins of his Teutons would be through you ere you could reach him. Not by the dagger in the dark will we strike this Roman, not by the venom in the cup nor the shaft from the ambush.”

The king turned and paced the floor a moment, his head bent in thought. Slowly his eyes grew murky with a thought so fearful he did not speak it aloud to the waiting warrior.

“I have become somewhat familiar with the maze of Roman politics during my stay in this accursed waste of mud and marble,” said he. “During a war on the Wall, Titus Sulla, as governor of this province, is supposed to hasten thither with his centuries. But this Sulla does not do; he is no coward, but the bravest avoid certain things–to each man, however bold, his own particular fear. So he sends in his place Caius Camillus, who in times of peace patrols the fens of the west, lest the Britons break over the border. And Sulla takes his place in the Tower of Trajan. Ha!”

He whirled and gripped Grom with steely fingers.

“Grom, take the red stallion and ride north! Let no grass grow under the stallion’s hoofs! Ride to Cormac na Connacht and tell him to sweep the frontier with sword and torch! Let his wild Gaels feast their fill of slaughter. After a time I will be with him. But for a time I have affairs in the west.”

Grom’s black eyes gleamed and he made a passionate gesture with his crooked hand–an instinctive move of savagery.

Bran drew a heavy bronze seal from beneath his tunic.

“This is my safe-conduct as an emissary to Roman courts,” he said grimly. “It will open all gates between this house and Baal-dor. If any official questions you too closely–here!”

Lifting the lid of an iron-bound chest, Bran took out a small, heavy leather bag which he gave into the hands of the warrior.

“When all keys fail at a gate,” said he, “try a golden key. Go now!”

There were no ceremonious farewells between the barbarian king and his barbarian vassal. Grom flung up his arm in a gesture of salute; then turning, he hurried out.

Bran stepped to a barred window and gazed out into the moonlit streets.

“Wait until the moon sets,” he muttered grimly. “Then I’ll take the road to–Hell! But before I go I have a debt to pay.”

The stealthy clink of a hoof on the flags reached him.

“With the safe-conduct and gold, not even Rome can hold a Pictish reaver,” muttered the king. “Now I’ll sleep until the moon sets.”

With a snarl at the marble frieze-work and fluted columns, as symbols of Rome, he flung himself down on a couch, from which he had long since impatiently torn the cushions and silk stuffs, as too soft for his hard body. Hate and the black passion of vengeance seethed in him, yet he went instantly to sleep. The first lesson he had learned in his bitter hard life was to snatch sleep any time he could, like a wolf that snatches sleep on the hunting trail. Generally his slumber was as light and dreamless as a panther’s, but tonight it was otherwise.

He sank into fleecy gray fathoms of slumber and in a timeless, misty realm of shadows he met the tall, lean, white-bearded figure of old Gonar, the priest of the Moon, high counsellor to the king. And Bran stood aghast, for Gonar’s face was white as driven snow and he shook as with ague. Well might Bran stand appalled, for in all the years of his life he had never before seen Gonar the Wise show any sign of fear.

“What now, old one?” asked the king. “Goes all well in Baal-dor?”

“All is well in Baal-dor where my body lies sleeping,” answered old Gonar. “Across the void I have come to battle with you for your soul. King, are you mad, this thought you have thought in your brain?”

“Gonar,” answered Bran somberly, “this day I stood still and watched a man of mine die on the cross of Rome. What his name or his rank, I do not know. I do not care. He might have been a faithful unknown warrior of mine, he might have been an outlaw. I only know that he was mine; the first scents he knew were the scents of the heather; the first light he saw was the sunrise on the Pictish hills. He belonged to me, not to Rome. If punishment was just, then none but me should have dealt it. If he were to be tried, none but me should have been his judge. The same blood flowed in our veins; the same fire maddened our brains; in infancy we listened to the same old tales, and in youth we sang the same old songs. He was bound to my heart-strings, as every man and every woman and every child of Pictland is bound. It was mine to protect him; now it is mine to avenge him.”

“But in the name of the gods, Bran,” expostulated the wizard, “take your vengeance in another way!

Return to the heather–mass your warriors–join with Cormac and his Gaels, and spread a sea of blood and flame the length of the great Wall!”

“All that I will do,” grimly answered Bran. “But now– *now*–I will have a vengeance such as no Roman ever dreamed of! Ha, what do they know of the mysteries of this ancient isle, which sheltered strange life long before Rome rose from the marshes of the Tiber?”

“Bran, there are weapons too foul to use, even against Rome!”

Bran barked short and sharp as a jackal.

“Ha! There are no weapons I would not use against Rome! My back is at the wall. By the blood of the fiends, has Rome fought me fair? Bah! I am a barbarian king with a wolfskin mantle and an iron crown, fighting with my handful of bows and broken pikes against the queen of the world. What

have I? The heather hills, the wattle huts, the spears of my shock-headed tribesmen! And I fight Rome–with her armored legions, her broad fertile plains and rich seas–her mountains and her rivers and her gleaming cities–her wealth, her steel, her gold, her mastery and her wrath. By steel and fire I will fight her–and by subtlety and treachery–by the thorn in the foot, the adder in the path, the venom in the cup, the dagger in the dark; aye," his voice sank somberly, "and by the worms of the earth!"

"But it is madness!" cried Gonar. "You will perish in the attempt you plan–you will go down to Hell and you will not return! What of your people then?"

"If I can not serve them I had better die," growled the king.

"But you can not even reach the beings you seek," cried Gonar. "For untold centuries they have dwelt *apart*. There is no door by which you can come to them. Long ago they severed the bonds that bound them to the world we know."

"Long ago," answered Bran somberly, "you told me that nothing in the universe was separated from the stream of Life–a saying the truth of which I have often seen evident. No race, no form of life but is close-knit somehow, by some manner, to the rest of Life and the world. Somewhere there is a thin link connecting *those* I seek to the world I know. Somewhere there is a Door. And somewhere among the bleak fens of the west I will find it."

Stark horror flooded Gonar's eyes and he gave back crying, "Wo! Wo! Wo! to Pictdom! Wo to the unborn kingdom! Wo, black wo to the sons of men! Wo, wo, wo, wo!"

Bran awoke to a shadowed room and the starlight on the window-bars. The moon had sunk from sight though its glow was still faint above the house tops. Memory of his dream shook him and he swore beneath his breath.

Rising, he flung off cloak and mantle, donning a light shirt of black mesh-mail, and girding on sword and dirk. Going again to the iron-bound chest he lifted several compact bags and emptied the clinking contents into the

leathern pouch at his girdle. Then wrapping his wide cloak about him, he silently left the house. No servants there were to spy on him–he had impatiently refused the offer of slaves which it was Rome's policy to furnish her barbarian emissaries. Gnarled Grom had attended to all Bran's simple needs.

The stables fronted on the courtyard. A moment's groping in the dark and he placed his hand over a great stallion's nose, checking the nicker of recognition. Working without a light he swiftly bridled and saddled the great brute, and went through the courtyard into a shadowy side-street, leading him. The moon was setting, the border of floating shadows widening along the western wall. Silence lay on the marble palaces and mud hovels of Eboracum under the cold stars.

Bran touched the pouch at his girdle, which was heavy with minted gold that bore the stamp of Rome. He had come to Eboracum posing as an emissary of Pictdom, to act the spy. But being a barbarian, he had not been able to play his part in aloof formality and sedate dignity. He retained a crowded memory of wild feasts where wine flowed in fountains; of white-bosomed Roman women, who, sated with civilized lovers, looked with something more than favor on a virile barbarian; of gladiatorial games; and of other games where dice clicked and spun and tall stacks of gold changed hands. He had drunk deeply and gambled recklessly, after the manner of barbarians, and he had had a remarkable run of luck, due possibly to the indifference with which he won or lost. Gold to the Pict was so much dust, flowing through his fingers. In his land there was no need of it. But he had learned its power in the boundaries of civilization.

Almost under the shadow of the northwestern wall he saw ahead of him loom the great watch-tower which was connected with and reared above the outer wall. One corner of the castle-like fortress, farthest from the wall, served as a dungeon. Bran left his horse standing in a dark alley, with the reins hanging on the ground, and stole like a prowling wolf into the shadows of the fortress.

The young officer Valerius was awakened from a light, unquiet sleep by a stealthy sound at the barred window. He sat up, cursing softly under his breath as the faint starlight which etched the window-bars fell across the

bare stone floor and reminded him of his disgrace. Well, in a few days, he ruminated, he'd be well out of it; Sulla would not be too harsh on a man with such high connections; then let any man or woman gibe at him! Damn that insolent Pict! But wait, he thought suddenly, remembering: what of the sound which had roused him?

"Hsssst!" it was a voice from the window.

Why so much secrecy? It could hardly be a foe–yet, why should it be a friend? Valerius rose and crossed his cell, coming close to the window. Outside all was dim in the starlight and he made out but a shadowy form close to the window.

"Who are you?" he leaned close against the bars, straining his eyes into the gloom.

His answer was a snarl of wolfish laughter, a long flicker of steel in the starlight. Valerius reeled away from the window and crashed to the floor, clutching his throat, gurgling horribly as he tried to scream.

Blood gushed through his fingers, forming about his twitching body a pool that reflected the dim starlight dully and redly.

Outside Bran glided away like a shadow, without pausing to peer into the cell. In another minute the guards would round the corner on their regular routine. Even now he heard the measured tramp of their iron-clad feet. Before they came in sight he had vanished and they clumped stolidly by the cell-windows with no intimation of the corpse that lay on the floor within.

Bran rode to the small gate in the western wall, unchallenged by the sleepy watch. What fear of foreign invasion in Eboracum?–and certain well organized thieves and women-stealers made it profitable for the watchmen not to be too vigilant. But the single guardsman at the western gate–his fellows lay drunk in a near-by brothel–lifted his spear and bawled for Bran to halt and give an account of himself. Silently the Pict reined closer. Masked in the dark cloak, he seemed dim and indistinct to the Roman, who was only aware of the glitter of his cold eyes in the gloom. But Bran held up his hand against the starlight and the soldier caught the gleam of gold; in

the other hand he saw a long sheen of steel. The soldier understood, and he did not hesitate between the choice of a golden bribe or a battle to the death with this unknown rider who was apparently a barbarian of some sort. With a grunt he lowered his spear and swung the gate open. Bran rode through, casting a handful of coins to the Roman. They fell about his feet in a golden shower, clinking against the flags. He bent in greedy haste to retrieve them and Bran Mak Morn rode westward like a flying ghost in the night.

III

Into the dim fens of the west came Bran Mak Morn. A cold wind breathed across the gloomy waste and against the gray sky a few herons flapped heavily. The long reeds and marsh-grass waved in broken undulations and out across the desolation of the wastes a few still meres reflected the dull light. Here and there rose curiously regular hillocks above the general levels, and gaunt against the somber sky Bran saw a marching line of upright monoliths–menhirs, reared by what nameless hands?

A faint blue line to the west lay the foothills that beyond the horizon grew to the wild mountains of Wales where dwelt still wild Celtic tribes–fierce blue-eyed men that knew not the yoke of Rome. A row of well-garrisoned watch-towers held them in check. Even now, far away across the moors, Bran glimpsed the unassailable keep men called the Tower of Trajan.

These barren wastes seemed the dreary accomplishment of desolation, yet human life was not utterly lacking. Bran met the silent men of the fen, reticent, dark of eye and hair, speaking a strange mixed tongue whose long-blended elements had forgotten their pristine separate sources. Bran recognized a certain kinship in these people to himself, but he looked on them with the scorn of a pure-blooded patrician for men of mixed strains.

Not that the common people of Caledonia were altogether pure-blooded; they got their stocky bodies and massive limbs from a primitive Teutonic race which had found its way into the northern tip of the isle even before the Celtic conquest of Britain was completed, and had been absorbed by the Picts. But the chiefs of Bran’s folk had kept their blood from foreign taint since the beginnings of time, and he himself was a pure-bred Pict of the Old Race. But these fenmen, overrun repeatedly by British, Gaelic and Roman

conquerors, had assimilated blood of each, and in the process almost forgotten their original language and lineage.

For Bran came of a race that was very old, which had spread over western Europe in one vast Dark Empire, before the coming of the Aryans, when the ancestors of the Celts, the Hellenes and the Germans were one primal people, before the days of tribal splitting-off and westward drift.

Only in Caledonia, Bran brooded, had his people resisted the flood of Aryan conquest. He had heard of a Pictish people called Basques, who in the crags of the Pyrenees called themselves an unconquered race; but he knew that they had paid tribute for centuries to the ancestors of the Gaels, before these Celtic conquerors abandoned their mountain-realm and set sail for Ireland. Only the Picts of Caledonia had remained free, and they had been scattered into small feuding tribes–he was the first acknowledged king in five hundred years–the beginning of a new dynasty–no, a revival of an ancient dynasty under a new name. In the very teeth of Rome he dreamed his dreams of empire.

He wandered through the fens, seeking a Door. Of his quest he said nothing to the dark-eyed fenmen.

They told him news that drifted from mouth to mouth–a tale of war in the north, the skirl of war-pipes along the winding Wall, of gathering-fires in the heather, of flame and smoke and rapine and the glutting of Gaelic swords in the crimson sea of slaughter. The eagles of the legions were moving northward and the ancient road resounded to the measured tramp of the iron-clad feet. And Bran, in the fens of the west, laughed, well pleased.

In Eboracum Titus Sulla gave secret word to seek out the Pictish emissary with the Gaelic name who had been under suspicion, and who had vanished the night young Valerius was found dead in his cell with his throat ripped out. Sulla felt that this sudden bursting flame of war on the Wall was connected closely with his execution of a condemned Pictish criminal, and he set his spy system to work, though he felt sure that Partha Mac Othna was by this time far beyond his reach. He prepared to march from Eboracum, but he did not accompany the considerable force of legionaries which he sent north. Sulla was a brave man, but each man has his own

dread, and Sulla's was Cormac na Connacht, the black-haired prince of the Gaels, who had sworn to cut out the governor's heart and eat it raw. So Sulla rode with his ever-present bodyguard, westward, where lay the Tower of Trajan with its war-like commander, Caius Camillus, who enjoyed nothing more than taking his superior's place when the red waves of war washed at the foot of the Wall. Devious politics, but the legate of Rome seldom visited this far isle, and what of his wealth and intrigues, Titus Sulla was the highest power in Britain.

And Bran, knowing all this, patiently waited his coming, in the deserted hut in which he had taken up his abode.

One gray evening he strode on foot across the moors, a stark figure, blackly etched against the dim crimson fire of the sunset. He felt the incredible antiquity of the slumbering land, as he walked like the last man on the day after the end of the world. Yet at last he saw a token of human life–a drab hut of wattle and mud, set in the reedy breast of the fen.

A woman greeted him from the open door and Bran's somber eyes narrowed with a dark suspicion. The woman was not old, yet the evil wisdom of ages was in her eyes; her garments were ragged and scanty, her black locks tangled and unkempt, lending her an aspect of wildness well in keeping with her grim surroundings. Her red lips laughed but there was no mirth in her laughter, only a hint of mockery, and under the lips her teeth showed sharp and pointed like fangs.

"Enter, master," said she, "if you do not fear to share the roof of the witch-woman of Dagon-moor!"

Bran entered silently and sat him down on a broken bench while the woman busied herself with the scanty meal cooking over an open fire on the squalid hearth. He studied her lithe, almost serpentine motions, the ears which were almost pointed, the yellow eyes which slanted curiously.

"What do you seek in the fens, my lord?" she asked, turning toward him with a supple twist of her whole body.

“I seek a Door,” he answered, chin resting on his fist. “I have a song to sing to the worms of the earth!”

She started upright, a jar falling from her hands to shatter on the hearth.

“This is an ill saying, even spoken in chance,” she stammered.

“I speak not by chance but by intent,” he answered.

She shook her head. “I know not what you mean.”

“Well you know,” he returned. “Aye, you know well! My race is very old– they reigned in Britain before the nations of the Celts and the Hellenes were born out of the womb of peoples. But my people were not first in Britain. By the mottles on your skin, by the slanting of your eyes, by the taint in your veins, I speak with full knowledge and meaning.”

Awhile she stood silent, her lips smiling but her face inscrutable.

“Man, are you mad?” she asked, “that in your madness you come seeking that from which strong men fled screaming in old times?”

“I seek a vengeance,” he answered, “that can be accomplished only by Them I seek.”

She shook her head.

“You have listened to a bird singing; you have dreamed empty dreams.”

“I have heard a viper hiss,” he growled, “and I do not dream. Enough of this weaving of words. I came seeking a link between two worlds; I have found it.”

“I need lie to you no more, man of the North,” answered the woman. “They you seek still dwell beneath the sleeping hills. They have drawn *apart*, farther and farther from the world you know.”

“But they still steal forth in the night to grip women straying on the moors,” said he, his gaze on her slanted eyes. She laughed wickedly.

“What would you of me?”

“That you bring me to Them.”

She flung back her head with a scornful laugh. His left hand locked like iron in the breast of her scanty garment and his right closed on his hilt. She laughed in his face.

“Strike and be damned, my northern wolf! Do you think that such life as mine is so sweet that I would cling to it as a babe to the breast?”

His hand fell away.

“You are right. Threats are foolish. I will buy your aid.”

“How?” the laughing voice hummed with mockery.

Bran opened his pouch and poured into his cupped palm a stream of gold.

“More wealth than the men of the fen ever dreamed of.”

Again she laughed. “What is this rusty metal to me? Save it for some white-breasted Roman woman who will play the traitor for you!”

“Name me a price!” he urged. “The head of an enemy–”

“By the blood in my veins, with its heritage of ancient hate, who is mine enemy but thee?” she laughed and springing, struck cat-like. But her dagger splintered on the mail beneath his cloak and he flung her off with a loathing flirt of his wrist which tossed her sprawling across her grass-strewn bunk. Lying there she laughed up at him.

“I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and it may be in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Atla’s dagger!” She rose and came close to him, her disquietingly long hands fastened fiercely into his cloak. “I will tell you, Black Bran, king of Caledon! Oh, I knew you when you came into my hut with your black hair and your cold eyes! I will lead you to the doors of Hell if you wish–and the price shall be the kisses of a king!

“What of my blasted and bitter life, I, whom mortal men loathe and fear? I have not known the love of men, the clasp of a strong arm, the sting of human kisses, I, Atla, the were-woman of the moors! What have I known but the lone winds of the fens, the dreary fire of cold sunsets, the whispering of the marsh grasses?–the faces that blink up at me in the waters of the meres, the foot-pad of night-things in the gloom, the glimmer of red eyes, the grisly murmur of nameless beings in the night!

“I am half-human, at least! Have I not known sorrow and yearning and crying wistfulness, and the drear ache of loneliness? Give to me, king–give me your fierce kisses and your hurtful barbarian’s embrace.

Then in the long drear years to come I shall not utterly eat out my heart in vain envy of the white-bosomed women of men; for I shall have a memory few of them can boast–the kisses of a king!

One night of love, oh king, and I will guide you to the gates of Hell!”

Bran eyed her somberly; he reached forth and gripped her arm in his iron fingers. An involuntary shudder shook him at the feel of her sleek skin. He nodded slowly and drawing her close to him, forced his head down to meet her lifted lips.

IV

The cold gray mists of dawn wrapped King Bran like a clammy cloak. He turned to the woman whose slanted eyes gleamed in the gray gloom.

“Make good your part of the contract,” he said roughly. “I sought a link between worlds, and in you I found it. I seek the one thing sacred to Them. It shall be the Key opening the Door that lies unseen between me and Them. Tell me how I can reach it.”

“I will,” the red lips smiled terribly. “Go to the mound men call Dagon’s Barrow. Draw aside the stone that blocks the entrance and go under the dome of the mound. The floor of the chamber is made of seven great stones, six grouped about the seventh. Lift out the center stone–and you will see!”

“Will I find the Black Stone?” he asked.

“Dagon’s Barrow is the Door to the Black Stone,” she answered, “if you dare follow the Road.”

“Will the symbol be well guarded?” He unconsciously loosened his blade in its sheath. The red lips curled mockingly.

“If you meet any on the Road you will die as no mortal man has died for long centuries. The Stone is not guarded, as men guard their treasures. Why should They guard what man has never sought? Perhaps They will be near, perhaps not. It is a chance you must take, if you wish the Stone. Beware, king of Pictdom! Remember it was your folk who, so long ago, cut the thread that bound Them to human life.

They were almost human then–they overspread the land and knew the sunlight. Now they have drawn *apart*. They know not the sunlight and they shun the light of the moon. Even the starlight they hate. Far, far apart have they drawn, who might have been men in time, but for the spears of your ancestors.”

The sky was overcast with misty gray, through which the sun shone coldly yellow when Bran came to Dagon’s Barrow, a round hillock overgrown with rank grass of a curious fungoid appearance. On the eastern side of the mound showed the entrance of a crudely built stone tunnel which evidently penetrated the barrow. One great stone blocked the entrance to the tomb. Bran laid hold of the sharp edges and exerted all his strength. It held fast. He drew his sword and worked the blade between the blocking stone and the sill. Using the sword as a lever, he worked carefully, and managed to loosen the great stone and wrench it out. A foul charnel-house scent flowed out of the aperture and the dim sunlight seemed less to illuminate the cavern-like opening than to be fouled by the rank darkness which clung there.

Sword in hand, ready for he knew not what, Bran groped his way into the tunnel, which was long and narrow, built up of heavy joined stones, and was too low for him to stand erect. Either his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the gloom, or the darkness was, after all, somewhat lightened

by the sunlight filtering in through the entrance. At any rate he came into a round low chamber and was able to make out its general dome-like outline. Here, no doubt, in old times, had reposed the bones of him for whom the stones of the tomb had been joined and the earth heaped high above them; but now of those bones no vestige remained on the stone floor. And bending close and straining his eyes, Bran made out the strange, startlingly regular pattern of that floor: six well-cut slabs clustered about a seventh, six-sided stone.

He drove his sword-point into a crack and pried carefully. The edge of the central stone tilted slightly upward. A little work and he lifted it out and leaned it against the curving wall. Straining his eyes downward he saw only the gaping blackness of a dark well, with small, worn steps that led downward and out of sight. He did not hesitate. Though the skin between his shoulders crawled curiously, he swung himself into the abyss and felt the clinging blackness swallow him.

Groping downward, he felt his feet slip and stumble on steps too small for human feet. With one hand pressed hard against the side of the well he steadied himself, fearing a fall into unknown and unlighted depths. The steps were cut into solid rock, yet they were greatly worn away. The farther he progressed, the less like steps they became, mere bumps of worn stone. Then the direction of the shaft changed sharply. It still led down, but at a shallow slant down which he could walk, elbows braced against the hollowed sides, head bent low beneath the curved roof. The steps had ceased altogether and the stone felt slimy to the touch, like a serpent’s lair. What beings, Bran wondered, had slithered up and down this slanting shaft, for how many centuries?

The tunnel narrowed until Bran found it rather difficult to shove through. He lay on his back and pushed himself along with his hands, feet first. Still he knew he was sinking deeper and deeper into the very guts of the earth; how far below the surface he was, he dared not contemplate. Then ahead a faint witch-fire gleam tinged the abysmal blackness. He grinned savagely and without mirth. If They he sought came suddenly upon him, how could he fight in that narrow shaft? But he had put the thought of personal fear

behind him when he began this hellish quest. He crawled on, thoughtless of all else but his goal.

And he came at last into a vast space where he could stand upright. He could not see the roof of the place, but he got an impression of dizzying vastness. The blackness pressed in on all sides and behind him he could see the entrance to the shaft from which he had just emerged–a black well in the darkness. But in front of him a strange grisly radiance glowed about a grim altar built of human skulls. The source of that light he could not determine, but on the altar lay a sullen night-black object–the Black Stone!

Bran wasted no time in giving thanks that the guardians of the grim relic were nowhere near. He caught up the Stone, and gripping it under his left arm, crawled into the shaft. When a man turns his back on peril its clammy menace looms more grisly than when he advances upon it. So Bran, crawling back up the nighted shaft with his grisly prize, felt the darkness turn on him and slink behind him, grinning with dripping fangs. Clammy sweat beaded his flesh and he hastened to the best of his ability, ears strained for some stealthy sound to betray that fell shapes were at his heels. Strong shudders shook him, despite himself, and the short hair on his neck prickled as if a cold wind blew at his back.

When he reached the first of the tiny steps he felt as if he had attained to the outer boundaries of the mortal world. Up them he went, stumbling and slipping, and with a deep gasp of relief, came out into the tomb, whose spectral grayness seemed like the blaze of noon in comparison to the stygian depths he had just traversed. He replaced the central stone and strode into the light of the outer day, and never was the cold yellow light of the sun more grateful, as it dispelled the shadows of black-winged nightmares of fear and madness that seemed to have ridden him up out of the black deeps. He shoved the great blocking stone back into place, and picking up the cloak he had left at the mouth of the tomb, he wrapped it about the Black Stone and hurried away, a strong revulsion and loathing shaking his soul and lending wings to his strides.

A gray silence brooded over the land. It was desolate as the blind side of the moon, yet Bran felt the potentialities of life–under his feet, in the brown earth–sleeping, but how soon to waken, and in what horrific fashion?

He came through the tall masking reeds to the still deep men called Dagon's Mere. No slightest ripple ruffled the cold blue water to give evidence of the grisly monster legend said dwelt beneath. Bran closely scanned the breathless landscape. He saw no hint of life, human or unhuman. He sought the instincts of his savage soul to know if any unseen eyes fixed their lethal gaze upon him, and found no response. He was alone as if he were the last man alive on earth.

Swiftly he unwrapped the Black Stone, and as it lay in his hands like a solid sullen block of darkness, he did not seek to learn the secret of its material nor scan the cryptic characters carved thereon. Weighing it in his hands and calculating the distance, he flung it far out, so that it fell almost exactly in the middle of the lake. A sullen splash and the waters closed over it. There was a moment of shimmering flashes on the bosom of the lake; then the blue surface stretched placid and unrippled again.

V

The were-woman turned swiftly as Bran approached her door. Her slant eyes widened.

"You! And alive! And sane!"

"I have been into Hell and I have returned," he growled. "What is more, I have that which I sought."

"The Black Stone?" she cried. "You really dared steal it? Where is it?"

"No matter; but last night my stallion screamed in his stall and I heard something crunch beneath his thundering hoofs which was not the wall of the stable–and there was blood on his hoofs when I came to see, and blood on the floor of the stall. And I have heard stealthy sounds in the night, and noises beneath my dirt floor, as if worms burrowed deep in the earth. They know I have stolen their Stone. Have you betrayed me?"

She shook her head.

“I keep your secret; they do not need my word to know you. The farther they have retreated from the world of men, the greater have grown their powers in other uncanny ways. Some dawn your hut will stand empty and if men dare investigate they will find nothing–except crumbling bits of earth on the dirt floor.”

Bran smiled terribly.

“I have not planned and toiled thus far to fall prey to the talons of vermin. If They strike me down in the night, They will never know what became of their idol–or whatever it be to Them. I would speak with Them.”

“Dare you come with me and meet them in the night?” she asked.

“Thunder of all gods!” he snarled. “Who are you to ask me if I dare? Lead me to Them and let me bargain for a vengeance this night. The hour of retribution draws nigh. This day I saw silvered helmets and bright shields gleam across the fens–the new commander has arrived at the Tower of Trajan and Caius Camillus has marched to the Wall.”

That night the king went across the dark desolation of the moors with the silent were-woman. The night was thick and still as if the land lay in ancient slumber. The stars blinked vaguely, mere points of red struggling through the unbreathing gloom. Their gleam was dimmer than the glitter in the eyes of the woman who glided beside the king. Strange thoughts shook Bran, vague, titanic, primeval. Tonight ancestral linkings with these slumbering fens stirred in his soul and troubled him with the fantasmal, eon-veiled shapes of monstrous dreams. The vast age of his race was borne upon him; where now he walked an outlaw and an alien, dark-eyed kings in whose mold he was cast had reigned in old times. The Celtic and Roman invaders were as strangers to this ancient isle beside his people. Yet his race likewise had been invaders, and there was an older race than his–a race whose beginnings lay lost and hidden back beyond the dark oblivion of antiquity.

Ahead of them loomed a low range of hills, which formed the easternmost extremity of those straying chains which far away climbed at last to the mountains of Wales. The woman led the way up what might have been a sheep-path, and halted before a wide black gaping cave.

“A door to those you seek, oh king!” her laughter rang hateful in the gloom. “Dare ye enter?”

His fingers closed in her tangled locks and he shook her viciously.

“Ask me but once more if I dare,” he grated, “and your head and shoulders part company! Lead on.”

Her laughter was like sweet deadly venom. They passed into the cave and Bran struck flint and steel. The flicker of the tinder showed him a wide dusty cavern, on the roof of which hung clusters of bats. Lighting a torch, he lifted it and scanned the shadowy recesses, seeing nothing but dust and emptiness.

“Where are They?” he growled.

She beckoned him to the back of the cave and leaned against the rough wall, as if casually. But the king’s keen eyes caught the motion of her hand pressing hard against a projecting ledge. He recoiled as a round black well gaped suddenly at his feet. Again her laughter slashed him like a keen silver knife. He held the torch to the opening and again saw small worn steps leading down.

“They do not need those steps,” said Atla. “Once they did, before your people drove them into the darkness. But you will need them.”

She thrust the torch into a niche above the well; it shed a faint red light into the darkness below. She gestured into the well and Bran loosened his sword and stepped into the shaft. As he went down into the mystery of the darkness, the light was blotted out above him, and he thought for an instant Atla had covered the opening again. Then he realized that she was descending after him.

The descent was not a long one. Abruptly Bran felt his feet on a solid floor. Atla swung down beside him and stood in the dim circle of light that drifted down the shaft. Bran could not see the limits of the place into which he had come.

“Many caves in these hills,” said Atla, her voice sounding small and strangely brittle in the vastness, “are but doors to greater caves which lie beneath, even as a man’s words and deeds are but small indications of the dark caverns of murky thought lying behind and beneath.”

And now Bran was aware of movement in the gloom. The darkness was filled with stealthy noises not like those made by any human foot. Abruptly sparks began to flash and float in the blackness, like flickering fireflies. Closer they came until they girdled him in a wide half-moon. And beyond the ring gleamed other sparks, a solid sea of them, fading away in the gloom until the farthest were mere tiny pin-points of light. And Bran knew they were the slanted eyes of the beings who had come upon him in such numbers that his brain reeled at the contemplation–and at the vastness of the cavern.

Now that he faced his ancient foes, Bran knew no fear. He felt the waves of terrible menace emanating from them, the grisly hate, the inhuman threat to body, mind and soul. More than a member of a less ancient race, he realized the horror of his position, but he did not fear, though he confronted the ultimate Horror of the dreams and legends of his race. His blood raced fiercely but it was with the hot excitement of the hazard, not the drive of terror.

“They know you have the Stone, oh king,” said Atla, and though he knew she feared, though he felt her physical efforts to control her trembling limbs, there was no quiver of fright in her voice. “You are in deadly peril; they know your breed of old–oh, they remember the days when their ancestors were men! I can not save you; both of us will die as no human has died for ten centuries. Speak to them, if you will; they can understand your speech, though you may not understand theirs. But it will avail not–you are human–and a Pict.”

Bran laughed and the closing ring of fire shrank back at the savagery in his laughter. Drawing his sword with a soul-chilling rasp of steel, he set his back against what he hoped was a solid stone wall. Facing the glittering eyes with his sword gripped in his right hand and his dirk in his left, he laughed as a blood-hungry wolf snarls.

“Aye,” he growled, “I am a Pict, a son of those warriors who drove your brutish ancestors before them like chaff before the storm!–who flooded the land with your blood and heaped high your skulls for a sacrifice to the Moon-Woman! You who fled of old before my race, dare ye now snarl at your master?

Roll on me like a flood, now, if ye dare! Before your viper fangs drink my life I will reap your multitudes like ripened barley–of your severed heads will I build a tower and of your mangled corpses will I rear up a wall! Dogs of the dark, vermin of Hell, worms of the earth, rush in and try my steel! When Death finds me in this dark cavern, your living will howl for the scores of your dead and your Black Stone will be lost to you for ever–for only I know where it is hidden and not all the tortures of all the Hells can wring the secret from my lips!”

Then followed a tense silence; Bran faced the fire-lit darkness, tensed like a wolf at bay, waiting the charge; at his side the woman cowered, her eyes ablaze. Then from the silent ring that hovered beyond the dim torchlight rose a vague abhorrent murmur. Bran, prepared as he was for anything, started. Gods, was *that* the speech of creatures which had once been called men?

Atla straightened, listening intently. From her lips came the same hideous soft sibilances, and Bran, though he had already known the grisly secret of her being, knew that never again could he touch her save with soul-shaken loathing.

She turned to him, a strange smile curving her red lips dimly in the ghostly light.

“They fear you, oh king! By the black secrets of R’lyeh, who are you that Hell itself quails before you?

Not your steel, but the stark ferocity of your soul has driven unused fear into their strange minds. They will buy back the Black Stone at any price.”

“Good,” Bran sheathed his weapons. “They shall promise not to molest you because of your aid of me.

And," his voice hummed like the purr of a hunting tiger, "They shall deliver into my hands Titus Sulla, governor of Eboracum, now commanding the Tower of Trajan. This They can do–how, I know not. But I know that in the old days, when my people warred with these Children of the Night, babes disappeared from guarded huts and none saw the stealers come or go. Do They understand?"

Again rose the low frightful sounds and Bran, who feared not their wrath, shuddered at their voices.

"They understand," said Atla. "Bring the Black Stone to Dagon's Ring tomorrow night when the earth is veiled with the blackness that foreruns the dawn. Lay the Stone on the altar. There They will bring Titus Sulla to you. Trust Them; They have not interfered in human affairs for many centuries, but They will keep their word."

Bran nodded and turning, climbed up the stair with Atla close behind him. At the top he turned and looked down once more. As far as he could see floated a glittering ocean of slanted yellow eyes upturned. But the owners of those eyes kept carefully beyond the dim circle of torchlight and of their bodies he could see nothing. Their low hissing speech floated up to him and he shuddered as his imagination visualized, not a throng of biped creatures, but a swarming, swaying myriad of serpents, gazing up at him with their glittering unwinking eyes.

He swung into the upper cave and Atla thrust the blocking stone back in place. It fitted into the entrance of the well with uncanny precision; Bran was unable to discern any crack in the apparently solid floor of the cavern. Atla made a motion to extinguish the torch, but the king stayed her.

"Keep it so until we are out of the cave," he grunted. "We might tread on an adder in the dark."

Atla's sweetly hateful laughter rose maddeningly in the flickering gloom.

VI

It was not long before sunset when Bran came again to the reed-grown marge of Dagon's Mere. Casting cloak and sword-belt on the ground, he stripped himself of his short leathern breeches. Then gripping his naked dirk in his teeth, he went into the water with the smooth ease of a diving seal. Swimming strongly, he gained the center of the small lake, and turning, drove himself downward.

The mere was deeper than he had thought. It seemed he would never reach the bottom, and when he did, his groping hands failed to find what he sought. A roaring in his ears warned him and he swam to the surface.

Gulping deep of the refreshing air, he dived again, and again his quest was fruitless. A third time he sought the depth, and this time his groping hands met a familiar object in the silt of the bottom. Grasping it, he swam up to the surface.

The Stone was not particularly bulky, but it was heavy. He swam leisurely, and suddenly was aware of a curious stir in the waters about him which was not caused by his own exertions. Thrusting his face below the surface, he tried to pierce the blue depths with his eyes and thought to see a dim gigantic shadow hovering there.

He swam faster, not frightened, but wary. His feet struck the shallows and he waded up on the shelving shore. Looking back he saw the waters swirl and subside. He shook his head, swearing. He had discounted the ancient legend which made Dagon's Mere the lair of a nameless water-monster, but now he had a feeling as if his escape had been narrow. The time-worn myths of the ancient land were taking form and coming to life before his eyes. What primeval shape lurked below the surface of that treacherous mere, Bran could not guess, but he felt that the fenmen had good reason for shunning the spot, after all.

Bran donned his garments, mounted the black stallion and rode across the fens in the desolate crimson of the sunset's afterglow, with the Black Stone wrapped in his cloak. He rode, not to his hut, but to the west, in the direction of the Tower of Trajan and the Ring of Dagon. As he covered the miles that lay between, the red stars winked out. Midnight passed him in the moonless night and still Bran rode on. His heart was hot for his meeting

with Titus Sulla. Atla had gloated over the anticipation of watching the Roman writhe under torture, but no such thought was in the Pict's mind. The governor should have his chance with weapons–with Bran's own sword he should face the Pictish king's dirk, and live or die according to his prowess. And though Sulla was famed throughout the provinces as a swordsman, Bran felt no doubt as to the outcome.

Dagon's Ring lay some distance from the Tower–a sullen circle of tall gaunt stones planted upright, with a rough-hewn stone altar in the center. The Romans looked on these menhirs with aversion; they thought the Druids had reared them; but the Celts supposed Bran's people, the Picts, had planted them–and Bran well knew what hands reared those grim monoliths in lost ages, though for what reasons, he but dimly guessed.

The king did not ride straight to the Ring. He was consumed with curiosity as to how his grim allies intended carrying out their promise. That They could snatch Titus Sulla from the very midst of his men, he felt sure, and he believed he knew how They would do it. He felt the gnawings of a strange misgiving, as if he had tampered with powers of unknown breadth and depth, and had loosed forces which he could not control. Each time he remembered that reptilian murmur, those slanted eyes of the night before, a cold breath passed over him. They had been abhorrent enough when his people drove Them into the caverns under the hills, ages ago; what had long centuries of retrogression made of them? In their nighted, subterranean life, had They retained any of the attributes of humanity at all?

Some instinct prompted him to ride toward the Tower. He knew he was near; but for the thick darkness he could have plainly seen its stark outline tusking the horizon. Even now he should be able to make it out dimly. An obscure, shuddersome premonition shook him and he spurred the stallion into swift canter.

And suddenly Bran staggered in his saddle as from a physical impact, so stunning was the surprize of what met his gaze. The impregnable Tower of Trajan was no more! Bran's astounded gaze rested on a gigantic pile of ruins–of shattered stone and crumbled granite, from which jutted the jagged and splintered ends of broken beams. At one corner of the tumbled heap one

tower rose out of the waste of crumpled masonry, and it leaned drunkenly as if its foundations had been half cut away.

Bran dismounted and walked forward, dazed by bewilderment. The moat was filled in places by fallen stones and broken pieces of mortared wall. He crossed over and came among the ruins. Where, he knew, only a few hours before the flags had resounded to the martial tramp of iron-clad feet, and the walls had echoed to the clang of shields and the blast of the loud-throated trumpets, a horrific silence reigned.

Almost under Bran's feet, a broken shape writhed and groaned. The king bent down to the legionary who lay in a sticky red pool of his own blood. A single glance showed the Pict that the man, horribly crushed and shattered, was dying.

Lifting the bloody head, Bran placed his flask to the pulped lips and the Roman instinctively drank deep, gulping through splintered teeth. In the dim starlight Bran saw his glazed eyes roll.

"The walls fell," muttered the dying man. "They crashed down like the skies falling on the day of doom.

Ah Jove, the skies rained shards of granite and hailstones of marble!"

"I have felt no earthquake shock," Bran scowled, puzzled.

"It was no earthquake," muttered the Roman. "Before last dawn it began, the faint dim scratching and clawing far below the earth. We of the guard heard it–like rats burrowing, or like worms hollowing out the earth. Titus laughed at us, but all day long we heard it. Then at midnight the Tower quivered and seemed to settle–as if the foundations were being dug away–"

A shudder shook Bran Mak Morn. The worms of the earth! Thousands of vermin digging like moles far below the castle, burrowing away the foundations–gods, the land must be honeycombed with tunnels and caverns–these creatures were even less human than he had thought–what ghastly shapes of darkness had he invoked to his aid?

“What of Titus Sulla?” he asked, again holding the flask to the legionary’s lips; in that moment the dying Roman seemed to him almost like a brother.

“Even as the Tower shuddered we heard a fearful scream from the governor’s chamber,” muttered the soldier. “We rushed there–as we broke down the door we heard his shrieks–they seemed to recede–

into the bowels of the earth! We rushed in; the chamber was empty. His blood-stained sword lay on the floor; in the stone flags of the floor a black hole gaped.

Then–the–towers–reeled–the–roof–broke;–through–a–storm–of–crashing–walls–I–crawled–”

A strong convulsion shook the broken figure.

“Lay me down, friend,” whispered the Roman. “I die.”

He had ceased to breathe before Bran could comply. The Pict rose, mechanically cleansing his hands. He hastened from the spot, and as he galloped over the darkened fens, the weight of the accursed Black Stone under his cloak was as the weight of a foul nightmare on a mortal breast.

As he approached the Ring, he saw an eery glow within, so that the gaunt stones stood etched like the ribs of a skeleton in which a witch-fire burns. The stallion snorted and reared as Bran tied him to one of the menhirs. Carrying the Stone he strode into the grisly circle and saw Atla standing beside the altar, one hand on her hip, her sinuous body swaying in a serpentine manner. The altar glowed all over with ghastly light and Bran knew some one, probably Atla, had rubbed it with phosphorus from some dank swamp or quagmire.

He strode forward and whipping his cloak from about the Stone, flung the accursed thing on to the altar.

“I have fulfilled my part of the contract,” he growled.

“And They, theirs,” she retorted. “Look!–they come!”

He wheeled, his hand instinctively dropping to his sword. Outside the Ring the great stallion screamed savagely and reared against his tether. The night wind moaned through the waving grass and an abhorrent soft hissing mingled with it. Between the menhirs flowed a dark tide of shadows, unstable and chaotic.

The Ring filled with glittering eyes which hovered beyond the dim illusive circle of illumination cast by the phosphorescent altar. Somewhere in the darkness a human voice tittered and gibbered idiotically. Bran stiffened, the shadows of a horror clawing at his soul.

He strained his eyes, trying to make out the shapes of those who ringed him. But he glimpsed only billowing masses of shadow which heaved and writhed and squirmed with almost fluid consistency.

OceanofPDF.com

“Let them make good their bargain!” he exclaimed angrily.

“Then see, oh king!” cried Atla in a voice of piercing mockery.

There was a stir, a seething in the writhing shadows, and from the darkness crept, like a four-legged animal, a human shape that fell down and groveled at Bran’s feet and writhed and mowed, and lifting a death’s-head, howled like a dying dog. In the ghastly light, Bran, soul-shaken, saw the blank glassy eyes, the bloodless features, the loose, writhing, froth-covered lips of sheer lunacy–gods, was this Titus Sulla, the proud lord of life and death in Eboracum’s proud city?

Bran bared his sword.

“I had thought to give this stroke in vengeance,” he said somberly. “I give it in mercy– *Vale Caesar*!”

The steel flashed in the eery light and Sulla’s head rolled to the foot of the glowing altar, where it lay staring up at the shadowed sky.

“They harmed him not!” Atla’s hateful laugh slashed the sick silence. “It was what he saw and came to know that broke his brain! Like all his heavy-footed race, he knew nothing of the secrets of this ancient land. This night he has been dragged through the deepest pits of Hell, where even you might have blenched!”

“Well for the Romans that they know not the secrets of this accursed land!” Bran roared, maddened,

“with its monster-haunted meres, its foul witch-women, and its lost caverns and subterranean realms where spawn in the darkness shapes of Hell!”

“Are they more foul than a mortal who seeks their aid?” cried Atla with a shriek of fearful mirth. “Give them their Black Stone!”

A cataclysmic loathing shook Bran’s soul with red fury.

“Aye, take your cursed Stone!” he roared, snatching it from the altar and dashing it among the shadows with such savagery that bones snapped under its impact. A hurried babel of grisly tongues rose and the shadows heaved in turmoil. One segment of the mass detached itself for an instant and Bran cried out in fierce revulsion, though he caught only a fleeting glimpse of the thing, had only a brief impression of a broad strangely flattened head, pendulous writhing lips that bared curved pointed fangs, and a hideously misshapen, dwarfish body that seemed *mottled*–all set off by those unwinking reptilian eyes. Gods!–the myths had prepared him for horror in human aspect, horror induced by bestial visage and stunted deformity–but this was the horror of nightmare and the night.

“Go back to Hell and take your idol with you!” he yelled, brandishing his clenched fists to the skies, as the thick shadows receded, flowing back and away from him like the foul waters of some black flood.

“Your ancestors were men, though strange and monstrous–but gods, ye have become in ghastly fact what my people called ye in scorn! Worms of the earth, back into your holes and burrows! Ye foul the air and leave on the clean earth the slime of the serpents ye have become! Gonar was right–there are shapes too foul to use even against Rome!”

He sprang from the Ring as a man flees the touch of a coiling snake, and tore the stallion free. At his elbow Atla was shrieking with fearful laughter, all human attributes dropped from her like a cloak in the night.

“King of Pictland!” she cried, “King of fools! Do you blench at so small a thing? Stay and let me show you real fruits of the pits! Ha! ha! ha! Run, fool, run! But you are stained with the taint–you have called them forth and they will remember! And in their own time they will come to you again!”

He yelled a wordless curse and struck her savagely in the mouth with his open hand. She staggered, blood starting from her lips, but her fiendish laughter only rose higher.

Bran leaped into the saddle, wild for the clean heather and the cold blue hills of the north where he could plunge his sword into clean slaughter and his sickened soul into the red maelstrom of battle, and forget the horror

which lurked below the fens of the west. He gave the frantic stallion the rein, and rode through the night like a hunted ghost, until the hellish laughter of the howling were-woman died out in the darkness behind.

The Symbol

Eons before Atlantean days in the time of the world's black dawn, Strange were the kings and grim the deeds that the pallid moon looked on.

When the great black cities split the stars and strange prows broke the tide, And smoke went up from ghastly shrines where writhing victims died.

Black magic raised its serpent head, and all things foul and banned, Till an angry God hurled up the sea against the shuddering land.

And the grisly kings they read their doom in the wind and the rising brine, And they set a pillar on a hill for a symbol and a sign.

Black shrine and hall and carven wall sank to eternal sleep,

And dawn looked down on a silent world and the blue unbroken deep.

Now men go forth in their daily ways and they reck not of the feel Of the veil that crushed, so long ago, the world beneath its heel.

But deep in the seaweed-haunted halls in the green unlighted deep, Inhuman kings await the day that shall break their chains of sleep.

And far in a grim untrodden land on a jungle-girded hill,

A pillar stands like a sign of Fate, in subtle warning still.

Carved in its blind black face of stone a fearful unknown rune Leers in the glare of the tropic sun and the cold of the leprous moon.

And it shall stand for a symbol mute that men are weak and blind, Till Hell roars up from the black abyss and horror swoops behind.

For this is the screed upon the shaft, oh, pallid sons of men:

“We that were lords of all the earth, shall rise and rule again.”

And dark is the doom of the tribes of earth, that hour wild and red, When the ages give their secrets up and the sea gives up its dead.

The Valley of the Lost

As a wolf spies upon its hunters, John Reynolds watched his pursuers. He lay close in a thicket on the slope, a red inferno of hate seething in his heart. He had ridden hard; up the slope behind him, where the dim path wound up out of Lost Valley, his crank-eyed mustang stood, head drooping, trembling, after the long run. Below him, not more than eighty yards away, stood his enemies, fresh come from the slaughter of his kinsmen.

In the clearing fronting Ghost Cave they had dismounted and were arguing among themselves. John Reynolds knew them all with an old, bitter hate. The black shadow of feud lay between them and himself.

The feuds of early Texas have been neglected by chroniclers who have sung the feuds of the Kentucky mountains, yet the men who first settled the Southwest were of the same breed as those mountaineers.

But there was a difference; in the mountain country feuds dragged on for generations; on the Texas frontier they were short, fierce and appallingly bloody.

The Reynolds-McCrill feud was long, as Texas feuds went–fifteen years had passed since old Esau Reynolds stabbed young Braxton McCrill to death with his bowie knife in the saloon at Antelope Wells, in a quarrel over range rights. For fifteen years the Reynoldses and their kin, the Brills, Allisons and Donnellys, had been at open war with the McCrills and their kin, the Killihers, the Fletchers and the Ords. There had been ambushes in the hills, murders on the open range, and gun-fights on the streets of the little cow-towns. Each clan had rustled the other’s cattle wholesale. Gunmen and outlaws called in by both sides to participate for pay had spread a reign of terror and lawlessness throughout the vicinity.

Settlers shunned the war-torn range; the feud was become a red obstacle in the way of progress and development–a savage retrogression which was demoralizing the whole countryside.

Little John Reynolds cared. He had grown up in the atmosphere of the feud, and it had become a burning obsession with him. The war had taken fearful toll on both clans, but the Reynoldses had suffered most.

He was the last of the fighting Reynoldses, for old Esau, the grim old patriarch who ruled the clan, would never again walk or sit in a saddle, with his legs paralyzed by McCrill bullets. John had seen his brothers shot down from ambush or killed in pitched battles.

Now the last stroke had well-nigh wiped out the waning clan. John Reynolds cursed as he thought of the trap into which they had walked in the saloon at Antelope Wells, where without warning their hidden foes had opened their murderous fire. There had fallen his cousin, Bill Donnelly; his sister's son, young Jonathon Brill; his brother-in-law, Job Allison; and Steve Kerney, the hired gunman. How he himself had shot his way through and gained the hitching-rack, untouched by that blasting hail of lead, John Reynolds hardly knew. But they had pressed him so closely he had not had time to mount his long-limbed rangy bay, but had been forced to take the first horse he came to–the crank-eyed, speedy, but short-winded mustang of the dead Jonathon Brill.

He had distanced his pursuers for a while–had gained the uninhabited hills and swung back into mysterious Lost Valley, with its silent thickets and crumbling stone columns, seeking to double back over the hills and gain the country of the Reynoldses. But the mustang had failed him. He had tied it up the slope, out of sight of the valley floor, and crept back, to see his enemies ride into the valley. There were five of them–old Jonas McCrill, with the perpetual snarl twisting his wolfish lips; Saul Fletcher, with his black beard and the limping, dragging gait that a fall in his youth from a wild mustang had left him; Bill Ord and Peter Ord, brothers; the outlaw Jack Solomon.

Jonas McCrill's voice came up to the silent watcher: "And I tell yuh he's a-hidin' somewhere in this valley. He was a-ridin' that mustang and it didn't

never have no guts. I'm bettin' it give plumb out on him time he got this far."

"Well"–it was the hated voice of Saul Fletcher–"what're we a-standin' 'round pow-wowin' for? Why don't we start huntin' him?"

"Not so fast," growled old Jonas. "Remember it's John Reynolds we're achasin'. We got plenty time–"

John Reynolds' fingers hardened on the stock of his single-action .45. There were two cartridges unfired in the cylinder. He pushed the muzzle through the stems of the thicket in front of him, his thumb drawing back the wicked fanged hammer. His grey eyes narrowed and became opaque as ice as he sighted down the long blue barrel. An instant he weighed his hatred, and chose Saul Fletcher. All the hate in his soul centered for an instant on that brutal black-bearded face, and the limping tread he had heard a night he lay wounded in a besieged corral with his brother's riddled corpse beside him, and fought off Saul and his brothers.

John Reynolds' finger crooked and the crash of the shot broke the echoes in the sleeping hills. Saul Fletcher swayed back, flinging his black beard drunkenly upward, and crashed face-down and headlong.

The others, with the quickness of men accustomed to frontier warfare, dropped behind rocks, and their answering shots roared back as they combed the slope blindly. The bullets tore through the thickets, whistling over the unseen killer's head. High up on the slope the mustang, out of the sight of the men in the valley but frightened by the noise, screamed shrilly and, rearing, snapped the reins that held him and fled away up the hill path. The drum of his hoofs on the stones dwindled in the distance.

Silence reigned for an instant, then Jonas McCrill's wrathful voice: "I told yuh he was a-hidin' here!

Come outa there–he's got clean away."

The old fighter's rangy frame rose up from behind the rock where he had taken refuge. Reynolds, grinning fiercely, took steady aim, then some

instinct of self-preservation held his hand. The others came out into the open.

“What are we a-waitin’ on?” yelled young Bill Ord, tears of rage in his eyes. “Here that coyote’s done shot Saul and’s ridin’ hell-for-leather away from here, and we’re a-standin’ ’round jawin’. I’m a-goin’

to–” He started for his horse.

“Yuh’re a-goin’ to listen to me!” roared old Jonas. “I warned yuh-all to go slow–but yuh would come lickety-split along like a bunch of blind buzzards, and now Saul’s layin’ there dead. lf we ain’t careful John Reynolds’ll kill all of us. Did I tell yuh-all he was here? Likely stopped to rest his horse. He can’t go far. This here’s a long hunt, like I told yuh at first. Let him get a good start. Long as he’s ahead of us, we got to watch out for ambushes. He’ll try to git back onto the Reynolds range. Well, we’re a-goin’ after him slow and easy and keep him hazed back all the time. We’ll be a-ridin’ the inside of a big half-circle and he can’t get by us–not on that short-winded mustang. We’ll just foller him and gather him in when his horse can’t do no more. And I purty well know where he’ll come to bay at–Blind Horse Canyon.”

“We’ll have to starve him out, then,” growled Jack Solomon.

“No, we won’t,” grinned old Jonas. “Bill, yuh high-tail it back to Antelope and git five or six sticks of dynamite. Then you git a fresh horse and follow our trail. If we catch him before he gits to the canyon, all right. If he beats us there and holes up, we’ll wait for yuh, and then blast him out.”

“What about Saul?” growled Peter Ord.

“He’s dead,” grunted Jonas. “Nothin’ we can do for him now. No time to take him back.” He glanced up at the sky, where already black dots wheeled against the blue. His gaze drifted to the walled-up mouth of the cavern in the steep cliff which rose at right angles to the slope up which the path wandered.

“We’ll break open that cave and put him in it,” he said. “We’ll pile up the rocks again and the wolves and buzzards can’t git to him. May be several days before we git back.”

“That cave’s ha’nted,” uneasily muttered Bill Ord. “The Injuns always said if yuh put a dead man in there, he’d come a-walkin’ out at midnight.”

“Shet up and help pick up pore Saul,” snapped Jonas. “Here’s your own kin a-layin’ dead, and his murderer a-ridin’ further away every second, and you talk about ha’nts.”

As they lifted the corpse, Jonas drew the long-barreled six-shooter from the holster and shoved the weapon into his own waist-band.

“Pore Saul,” he grunted. “He’s shore dead. Shot plumb through the heart. Dead before he hit the ground, I reckon. Well, we’ll make them damned Reynoldses pay for it.”

They carried the dead man to the cave and, laying him down, attacked the rocks which blocked the entrance. These were soon torn aside, and Reynolds saw the men carry the body inside. They emerged almost immediately, minus their burden, and mounted their horses. Young Bill Ord swung away down the valley and vanished among the trees, and the rest cantered up the winding trail that led up into the hills.

They passed within a hundred feet of his refuge and John Reynolds hugged the earth, fearing discovery.

But they did not glance in his direction. He heard the dwindling of their hoofs over the rocky path, then silence settled again over the ancient valley.

John Reynolds rose cautiously, looked about him as a hunted wolf looks, then made his way quickly down the slope. He had a very definite purpose in mind. A single unfired cartridge was all his ammunition; but about the dead body of Saul Fletcher was a belt well filled with .45 calibre cartridges.

As he attacked the rocks heaped in the cave’s mouth, there hovered in his mind the curious dim speculations which the cave and the valley itself

always roused in him. Why had the Indians named it the Valley of the Lost, which white men shortened to Lost Valley? Why had the red men shunned it? Once in the memory of white men, a band of Kiowas, fleeing the vengeance of Bigfoot Wallace and his rangers, had taken up their abode there and fallen on evil times. The survivors of the tribe had fled, telling wild tales in which murder, fratricide, insanity, vampirism, slaughter and cannibalism had played grim parts.

Then six white men, brothers, Stark by name, had settled in Lost Valley. They had reopened the cave which the Kiowas had blocked up. Horror had fallen on them and in one night five died by one anothers'

hands. The survivor had walled up the cave mouth again and departed, where none knew, though word had drifted through the settlements of a man named Stark who had come among the remnants of those Kiowas who had once lived in Lost Valley and, after a long talk with them, had cut his own throat with his bowie knife.

What was the mystery of Lost Valley, if not a web of lies and legends? What the meaning of those crumbling stones which, scattered all over the valley, half hidden in the climbing growth, bore a curious symmetry, especially in the moonlight, so that some people believed when the Indians swore they were the half-destroyed columns of a prehistoric city which once stood in Lost Valley? Reynolds himself had seen, before it crumbled into a heap of grey dust, a skull unearthed at the base of a cliff by a wandering prospector, which seemed neither Caucasian nor Indian–a curious, peaked skull, which but for the formation of the jaw-bones might have been that of some unknown antediluvian animal.

Such thoughts flitted vaguely and momentarily through John Reynolds' mind as he dislodged the boulders, which the McCrills had put back loosely, just firmly enough to keep a wolf or buzzard from squeezing through. In the main his thoughts were engrossed with the cartridges in dead Saul Fletcher's belt. A fighting chance! A lease on life! He would fight his way out of the hills yet–would gather the remnants of his clan and strike back. He would bring in more gunmen and cutthroats to reinforce the thinning ranks.

He would flood the whole range with blood and bring the countryside to ruin, if by those means he might be avenged. For years he had been the moving factor in the feud. When even old Esau had weakened and wished for peace, John Reynolds had kept the flame of hate blazing. The feud had become his one driving motive–his one interest in life and reason for existence. The last boulders fell aside.

John Reynolds stepped into the semi-gloom of the cavern. It was not large but the shadows seemed to cluster there in almost tangible substance. Slowly his eyes accustomed themselves; an involuntary exclamation broke from his lips–the cave was empty! He swore in bewilderment. He had seen men carry Saul Fletcher's corpse into the cave and come out again, empty handed. Yet no corpse lay on the dusty cavern floor. He went to the back of the cave, glanced at the straight, even wall, bent and examined the smooth rock floor. His keen eyes, straining in the gloom, made out a dull smear of blood on the stone. It ended abruptly at the back wall, and there was no stain on the wall.

Reynolds leaned closer, supporting himself by a hand propped against the stone wall. And suddenly and shockingly the sensation of solidity and stability vanished. The wall gave way beneath his propping hand, a section swung inward, precipitating him headlong through a black gaping opening. His catlike quickness could not save him. It was as if the yawning shadows reached tenuous and invisible hands to jerk him headlong into the darkness.

He did not fall far. His outflung hands struck what seemed to be steps carved in the stone, and on them he scrambled and floundered for an instant. Then he righted himself and turned back to the opening through which he had fallen. The secret door had closed and only a smooth stone wall met his groping fingers. He fought down a rising panic. How the McCrills had come to know of this secret chamber he could not say, but quite evidently they had placed Saul Fletcher's body in it. And there, trapped like a rat, they would find John Reynolds when they returned. Then in the darkness a grim smile curled Reynolds' thin lips. When they opened the secret door, he would be hidden in the darkness, while they would be etched against the dim light of the outer cave. Where could he find a more perfect ambush? But first he must find the body and secure the cartridges.

He turned to grope his way down the steps and his first stride brought him to a level floor. It was a sort of narrow tunnel, he decided, for though he could not touch the roof, a stride to the right or the left and his outstretched hand encountered a wall, seemingly too even and symmetrical to have been a work of nature. He went slowly, groping in the darkness, keeping in touch with the walls and momentarily expecting to stumble on Saul Fletcher's body. And as he did not, a dim horror began to grow in his soul.

The McCrills had not been in the cavern long enough to carry the body so far back into the darkness. A feeling was rising in John Reynolds that the McCrills had not entered the tunnel at all–that they were not aware of its existence. Then where, in the name of sanity, was Saul Fletcher's corpse?

He stopped short, jerking out his six-shooter. Something was coming up the dark tunnel–something that walked upright and lumberingly.

John Reynolds knew it was a man, wearing high-heeled riding boots; no other foot-wear makes the same stilted sound. He caught the jingle of the spurs. And a dark tide of nameless horror moved sluggishly in John Reynolds' mind as he heard that halting tread approach, and remembered the night when he had lain at bay in the old corral, with his younger brother dying beside him, and heard a limping, dragging footstep endlessly circle his refuge, out in the night where Saul Fletcher led his wolves and sought for a way to come upon his back.

Had the man only been wounded? These steps sounded stiff and blundering, such as a wounded man might make. No–John Reynolds had seen too many men die; he knew that his bullet had gone straight through Saul Fletcher's heart–possibly tearing the heart clear out, certainly killing him instantly. Besides, he had heard old Jonas McCrill declare the man was stone-dead. No–Saul Fletcher lay lifeless somewhere in this black cavern. It was some other lame man who was coming up that silent tunnel.

Now the tread ceased. The man was fronting him, separated only by a few feet of utter blackness. What was there in that to quicken the iron pulse of John Reynolds, who had unflinchingly faced death times without number?–what to make his flesh crawl and his tongue freeze to his palate?–to awake sleeping instincts of fear as a man senses the presence of an unseen serpent,

and make him feel that somehow the other was aware of his presence with eyes that pierced the darkness?

In the silence John Reynolds heard the staccato pounding of his own heart. And with shocking suddenness the man lunged. Reynolds' straining ears caught the first movement of that lunge and he fired point-blank. And he screamed–a terrible animal-like scream. Heavy arms locked upon him and unseen teeth worried at his flesh, but in the frothing frenzy of his fear, his own strength was superhuman. For in the flash of the shot he had seen a bearded face with slack hanging mouth and staring dead eyes. *Saul Fletcher!* The dead, come back from Hell.

As in a nightmare Reynolds knew that fiendish battle in the dark, where the dead sought to drag down the living. He felt himself hurled to and fro in the grip of the clammy hands. He was flung with bone-shattering force against the stone walls. Dashed to the floor, the silent horror squatted ghoul-like upon him, its horrid fingers sinking deep into his throat.

In that nightmare, John Reynolds had no time to doubt his own sanity. He knew that he was battling a dead man. The flesh of his foe was cold with a charnel-house clamminess. Under the torn shirt he had felt the round bullet-hole, caked with clotted blood. No single sound came from the loose lips.

Choking and gasping, John Reynolds tore the strangling hands aside and flung the thing off, reeling. For an instant the darkness again separated them; then the horror came hurtling toward him again. As the thing lunged Reynolds caught blindly and gained the wrestling hold he wished; and hurling all his power behind his attack, he dashed the horror headlong, falling upon it with his full weight. Saul Fletcher's spine snapped like a rotten branch and the tearing hands went limp, the straining limbs relaxed. Something flowed from the lax body and whispered away through the darkness like a ghostly wind, and John Reynolds instinctively knew that at last Saul Fletcher was truly dead.

Panting and shaken, Reynolds rose. The tunnel remained in utter darkness. But down it, in the direction from which the walking corpse had come stalking, there whispered a faint throbbing that was hardly sound at all, yet had in its pulsing a dark weird music. Reynolds shuddered and the sweat

froze on his body. The dead man lay at his feet in the thick darkness and faintly to his ears came that unbearably sweet, unbearably evil echo, like devil-drums beating faint and far in the dim caverns of Hell.

Reason urged him to turn back–to fight against that blind door until he burst its stone, if human power could burst it. But he realized that reason and sanity had been left behind him. A single step had plunged him from a normal world of material realities into a realm of nightmare and lunacy. He decided that he was mad, or else dead and in Hell. Those dim tom-toms drew him–they tugged at his heart-strings eerily.

They repelled him and filled his soul with shadowy and monstrous conjectures, yet their call was irresistible. He fought the mad impulse to shriek and fling his arms wildly aloft and run down the black tunnel as a rabbit runs down the prairie dog's burrow into the jaws of the waiting rattler.

Fumbling in the dark, he found his revolver and still fumbling, he loaded it with cartridges from Saul Fletcher's belt. He felt no more aversion now at touching the body than he would have felt at handling any dead flesh. Whatever unholy power had animated the corpse, it had left it when the snapping of the spine had unraveled the nerve centers and disrupted the roots of the muscular system.

Then, revolver in hand, John Reynolds went down the tunnel, drawn by a power he could not fathom, toward a doom he could not guess.

The throb of the tom-toms grew only slightly in volume as he advanced. How far below the hills he was he could not know, but the tunnel slanted downward and he had gone a long way. Often his groping hands encountered doorways–corridors leading off the main tunnel, he believed. At last he was aware that he had left the tunnel and had come out into a vast open space. He could see nothing, but he somehow felt the vastness of the place. And in the darkness a faint light began. It throbbed as the drums throbbed, waning and waxing in time to their pulsing, but it grew slowly, casting a weird glow that was more like green than any color Reynolds had ever seen, but was not really green, nor any other sane or earthly color.

Reynolds approached it. It widened. It cast a shimmering radiance over the smooth stone floor, illuminating fantastic mosaics. It cast its sheen high in the hovering shadows, but he could see no roof.

Now he stood bathed in its weird glow, so that his flesh looked like a dead man's. Now he saw the roof, high and vaulted, brooding far above him like a dusky midnight sky, and towering walls, gleaming and dark, sweeping up to tremendous heights, their bases fringed with squat shadows from which glittered other lights, small and scintillant.

He saw the source of the illumination–a strange carven stone altar on which burned what appeared to be a giant jewel of an unearthly hue, like the light it emitted. Greenish flame jetted from it; it burned as a bit of coal might burn, but it was not consumed. Just behind it a feathered serpent reared from its coils, a fantasy carven of some clear crystalline substance the tints of which in the weird light were never the same, but which pulsed and shimmered and changed as the drums–now on all sides of him–pulsed and throbbed.

Abruptly something alive moved beside the altar and John Reynolds, though he was expecting anything, recoiled. At first he thought it a huge reptile which slithered about the altar, then he saw that it stood upright as a man stands. As he met the menacing glitter of its eyes, he fired point-blank and the thing went down like a slaughtered ox, its skull shattered. Reynolds wheeled as a sinister rustling rose on his ears–at least these beings could be killed. Then he checked the lifted muzzle. The drums had never ceased. The fringing shadows had moved out from the darkness at the base of the walls and drawn about him in a wide ring. And though at first glance they possessed the semblance of men, he knew they were not human.

The weird light flickered and danced over them, and back in the deeper darkness the soft, evil drums whispered their accompanying undertone everlastingly. John Reynolds stood aghast at what he saw.

It was not their dwarfish figures which caused his shudder, nor even the unnaturally made hands and feet–it was their heads. He knew, now, of what race was the skull found by the prospector. Like it, these heads were peaked and malformed, curiously flattened at the sides. There was no sign of ears,

as if their organs of hearing, like a serpent's, were beneath the skin. The noses were like a python's snout, the mouth and jaws much less human in appearance than his recollection of the skull would have led him to suppose. The eyes were small, glittering and reptilian. The squamous lips writhed back, showing pointed fangs, and John Reynolds felt that their bite would be as deadly as a rattlesnake's. Garments they wore none, nor did they bear any weapons.

He tensed himself for the death-struggle, but no rush came. The snake-people sat about him in a great cross-legged circle, and beyond the circle he saw them massed thick. And now he felt a stirring in his consciousness, an almost tangible beating of wills upon his senses. He was distinctly aware of a concentrated invasion of his innermost mind, and realized that these fantastic beings were seeking to convey their commands or wishes to him by medium of thought. On what common plane could he meet these inhuman creatures? Yet in some dim, strange, telepathic way they made him understand some of their meaning, and he realized with a grisly shock that whatever these things were now, they had once been at least partly human, else they had never been able to so bridge the gulf between the completely human and the completely bestial.

He understood that he was the first living man to come into their innermost realm–the first to look on the shining serpent, the Terrible Nameless One who was older than the world; that before he died, he was to know all which had been denied to the sons of men concerning the mysterious valley, that he might take this knowledge into Eternity with him, and discuss these matters with those who had gone before him.

The drums rustled, the strange light leaped and shimmered, and before the altar came one who seemed in authority–an ancient monstrosity whose skin was like the whitish hide of an old serpent, and who wore on his peaked skull a golden circlet, set with weird gems. He bent and made suppliance to the feathered snake. Then with a sharp implement of some sort which left a phosphorescent mark, he drew a cryptic triangular figure on the floor before the altar, and in the figure he strewed some sort of glimmering dust.

From it reared up a thin spiral which grew to a gigantic shadowy serpent, feathered and horrific, and then changed and faded and became a cloud of

greenish smoke. This smoke billowed out before John Reynolds' eyes and hid the serpent-eyed ring, and the altar, and the cavern itself. All the universe dissolved into the green smoke, in which titanic scenes and alien landscapes rose and shifted and faded, and monstrous shapes lumbered and leered.

Abruptly the chaos crystallized. He was looking into a valley which he did not recognize. Somehow he knew it was Lost Valley, but in it towered a gigantic city of dully gleaming stone. John Reynolds was a man of the outlands and the waste places. He had never seen the great cities of the world. But he knew that nowhere in the world today such a city reared up to the sky.

Its towers and battlements were those of an alien age. Its outline baffled his gaze with its unnatural aspects; it was a city of lunacy to the normal human eye, with its hints of alien dimensions and abnormal principles of architecture. Through it moved strange figures, human, yet of a humanity definitely different from his own. They were clad in robes, their hands and feet were less abnormal, their ears and mouths more like those of normal humans, yet there was an undoubted kinship between them and the monsters of the cavern. It showed in the curious peaked skull, though this was less pronounced and bestial in the people of the city.

He saw them in the twisting streets, and in their colossal buildings, and he shuddered at the inhumanness of their lives. Much they did was beyond his ken; he could understand their actions and motives no more than a Zulu savage might understand the events of modern London. But he did understand that these people were very ancient and very evil. He saw them enact rituals that froze his blood with horror, obscenities and blasphemies beyond his understanding. He grew sick with a sensation of pollution, of contamination. Somehow he knew that this city was the remnant of an outworn age–that this people represented the survival of an epoch lost and forgotten.

Then a new people came upon the scene. Over the hills came wild men clad in hides and feathers, armed with bows and flint-tipped weapons. They were, Reynolds knew, Indians, and yet not Indians as he knew them. They were slant-eyed, and their skins were yellowish rather than copper-colored.

Somehow he knew that these were the nomadic ancestors of the Toltecs, wandering and conquering on their long trek before they settled in upland valleys far to the south and evolved their own special type and civilization. These were still close to the primal Mongolian root-stock, and he gasped at the gigantic vistas of time this realization evoked.

Reynolds saw the warriors move like a giant wave on the towering walls. He saw the defenders man the towers and deal death in strange and grisly forms to the invaders. He saw them reel back again and again, then come on once more with the blind ferocity of the primitive. This strange evil city, filled with mysterious people of a different order, was in their path and they could not pass until they had stamped it out.

Reynolds marveled at the fury of the invaders who wasted their lives like water, matching the cruel and terrible science of an unknown civilization with sheer courage and the might of man-power. Their bodies littered the plateau, but not all the forces of Hell could keep them back. They rolled like a wave to the foot of the towers. They scaled the walls in the teeth of sword and arrow and death in ghastly forms.

They gained the parapets. They met their enemies hand-to-hand. Bludgeons and axes beat down the lunging spears, the thrusting swords. The tall figures of the barbarians towered over the smaller forms of the defenders.

Red hell raged in the city. The siege became a street battle, the battle a rout, the rout a slaughter. Smoke rose and hung in clouds over the doomed city.

The scene changed. Reynolds looked on charred and ruined walls from which smoke still rose. The conquerors had passed on, the survivors gathered in the red-stained temple before their curious god–a crystalline carven serpent on a fantastic stone altar. Their age had ended; their world crumbled suddenly.

They were the remnants of an otherwise extinct race. They could not rebuild their marvelous city and they feared to remain within its broken walls, a prey to every passing tribe. Reynolds saw them take up their altar and its god and follow an ancient man clad in a mantle of feathers and wearing on his head a gem-set circlet of gold. He led them across the valley

to a hidden cave. They entered and squeezing through a narrow rift in the back wall, came into a vast network of caverns honeycombing the hills.

Reynolds saw them at work exploring these labyrinths, excavating and enlarging, hewing the walls and floors smooth, enlarging the rift that let into the outer cavern and setting therein a cunningly hung door, so that it seemed part of the solid wall.

Then an ever-shifting panorama denoted the passing of many centuries. The people lived in the caverns, and as time passed they adapted themselves more and more to their surroundings, each generation going less frequently into the outer sunlight. They learned to obtain their food in shuddersome ways from the earth. Their ears grew smaller, their bodies more dwarfish, their eyes more catlike. John Reynolds stood aghast as he watched the race changing through the ages.

Outside in the valley the deserted city crumbled and fell into ruins, becoming prey to lichen and weed and tree. Men came and briefly meditated among these ruins–tall Mongolian warriors, and dark inscrutable little people men call the Mound Builders. And as the centuries passed, the visitors conformed more and more to the type of Indian as he knew it, until at last the only men who came were painted red men with stealthy feet and feathered scalp-locks. None ever tarried long in that haunted place with its cryptic ruins.

Meanwhile, in the caverns, the Old People abode and grew strange and terrible. They fell lower and lower in the scale of humanity, forgetting first their written language, and gradually their human speech.

But in other ways they extended the boundaries of life. In their nighted kingdom they discovered other, older caverns, which led them into the very bowels of the earth. They learned lost secrets, long forgotten or never known by men, sleeping in the blackness far below the hills. Darkness is conducive to silence, so they gradually lost the power of speech, a sort of telepathy taking its place. And with each grisly gain they lost more of their human attributes. Their ears vanished; their noses grew snout-like; their eyes became unable to bear the light of the sun, and even of the stars. They had long abandoned the use of fire, and the only light they used was the

weird gleams evoked from their gigantic jewel on the altar, and even this they did not need. They changed in other ways. John Reynolds, watching, felt the cold sweat bead his body. For the slow transmutation of the Old People was horrible to behold, and many and hideous were the shapes which moved among them before their ultimate mold and nature were evolved.

Yet they remembered the sorcery of their ancestors and added to this their own black wizardry developed far below the hills. And at last they attained the peak of that necromancy. John Reynolds had had horrific inklings of it in fragmentary glimpses of the olden times, when the wizards of the Old People had sent forth their spirits from their sleeping bodies to whisper evil things in the ears of their enemies.

A tribe of tall painted warriors came into the valley, bearing the body of a great chief, slain in tribal warfare.

Long eons had passed. Of the ancient city only scattered columns stood among the trees. A landslide had laid bare the entrance of the outer cavern. This the Indians found and therein they placed the body of their chief with his weapons broken beside him. Then they blocked up the cave mouth with stones and took up their journey, but night caught them in the valley.

Through all the ages, the Old People had found no other entrance or exit to or from the pits, save the small outer cave. It was the one doorway between their grim realm and the world they had so long abandoned. Now they came through the secret door into the outer cavern, whose dim light they could endure, and John Reynolds' hair stood up at what he saw. For they took the corpse and laid it before the altar of the feathered serpent, and an ancient wizard lay upon it, his mouth against the mouth of the dead, and above them tom-toms pulsed and strange fires flickered, and the voiceless votaries with soundless chants invoked gods forgotten before the birth of Egypt, until inhuman voices bellowed in the outer darkness and the sweep of monstrous wings filled the shadows. And slowly life ebbed from the sorcerer and stirred the limbs of the dead chief. The body of the wizard rolled limply aside and the corpse of the chief stood up stiffly; and with puppet-like steps and glassy staring eyes it went up the dark tunnel and

through the secret door into the outer cave. The dead hands tore aside the stones and into the starlight stalked the Horror.

Reynolds saw it walk stiffly under the shuddering trees while the night things fled gibbering. He saw it come into the camp of the warriors. The rest was horror and madness, as the dead thing pursued its former companions and tore them limb from limb. The valley became a shambles before one of the braves, conquering his terror, turned on his pursuer and hewed through its spine with a stone axe.

And even as the twice-slain corpse crumpled, Reynolds saw, on the floor of the cavern before the carved serpent, the form of the wizard quicken and live as his spirit returned to him from the corpse he had caused it to animate.

The soundless glee of incarnate demons shook the crawling blackness of the pits, and Reynolds shrank before the verminous fiends gloating over their new-found power to deal horror and death to the sons of men, their ancient enemies.

But the word spread from clan to clan, and men came not to the Valley of the Lost. For many a century it lay dreaming and deserted beneath the sky. Then came mounted braves with trailing war-bonnets, painted with the colors of the Kiowas, warriors of the north, who knew nothing of the mysterious valley.

They pitched their camps in the very shadows of those sinister monoliths which were now no more than shapeless stones.

They placed their dead in the cavern. Reynolds saw the horrors that took place when the dead came ravening by night among the living to slay and *devour*–and to drag screaming victims into the nighted caverns and the demoniac doom that awaited them. The legions of Hell were loosed in the Valley of the Lost, where chaos reigned and nightmare and madness stalked. Those who were left alive and sane walled up the cavern and rode out of the hills like men riding from Hell.

Once more Lost Valley lay gaunt and naked to the stars. Then again the coming of men broke the primal solitude and smoke rose among the trees. And John Reynolds caught his breath with a start of horror as he saw these were white men, clad in the buckskins of an earlier day–six of them, so much alike that he knew they were brothers.

He saw them fell trees and build a cabin in the clearing. He saw them hunt game in the mountains and begin clearing a field for corn. And all the time he saw the vermin of the hills waiting with ghoulish lust in the darkness. They could not look from their caverns with their nighted eyes, but by their godless sorcery they were aware of all that took place in the valley. They could not come forth in their own bodies in the light, but they waited with the patience of night and the still places.

Reynolds saw one of the brothers find the cavern and open it. He entered and the secret door hung open.

The man went into the tunnel. He could not see, in the darkness, the shapes of horror that stole slavering about him, but in sudden panic he lifted his muzzle-loading rifle and fired blindly, screaming as the flash showed him the hellish forms that ringed him in. In the utter blackness following the vain shot they rushed, overthrowing him by the power of their numbers, sinking their snaky fangs into his flesh. As he died he slashed half a dozen of them to pieces with his bowie knife, but the poison did its work quickly.

Reynolds saw them drag the corpse before the altar; he saw again the horrible transmutation of the dead, which rose grinning vacantly and stalked forth. The sun had set in a welter of dull crimson. Night had fallen. To the cabin where his brothers slept, wrapped in their blankets, stalked the dead. Silently the groping hands swung open the door. The horror crouched in the gloom, its bared teeth shining, its dead eyes gleaming glassily in the starlight. One of the brothers stirred and mumbled, then sat up and stared at the motionless shape in the doorway. He called the dead man’s name–then he shrieked hideously–the Horror sprang–

From John Reynolds’ throat burst a cry of intolerable horror. Abruptly the pictures vanished, with the smoke. He stood in the weird glow before the altar, the tom-toms throbbing softly and evilly, the fiendish faces hemming

him in. And now from among them crept, on his belly like the serpent he was, the one which wore the gemmed circlet, venom dripping from his bared fangs. Loathsomely he slithered toward John Reynolds, who fought the inclination to leap upon the foul thing and stamp out its life. There was no escape; he could send his bullets crashing through the swarm and mow down all in front of the muzzle, but those would be as nothing beside the hundreds which hemmed him in. He would die there in the waning light, and they would send his corpse blundering forth, lent a travesty of life by the spirit of the wizard, just as they had sent Saul Fletcher. John Reynolds grew tense as steel as his wolf-like instinct to live rose above the maze of horror into which he had fallen.

And suddenly his human mind rose above the vermin who threatened him, as he was electrified by a swift thought that was like an inspiration. With a fierce inarticulate cry of triumph, he bounded sideways just as the crawling monstrosity lunged. It missed him, sprawling headlong, and Reynolds snatched from the altar the carven serpent and, holding it on high, thrust against it the muzzle of his cocked pistol. He did not need to speak. In the dying light his eyes blazed madly. The Old People wavered back. Before them lay he whose peaked skull Reynolds' pistol had shattered. They knew a crook of his trigger-finger would splinter their fantastic god into shining bits.

For a tense space the tableau held. Then Reynolds felt their silent surrender. Freedom in exchange for their god. It was again borne on him that these beings were not truly bestial, since true beasts know no gods. And this knowledge was the more terrible, for it meant that these creatures had evolved into a type neither bestial nor human, a type outside of nature and sanity.

The snakish figures gave back on each side, and the waning light sprang up again. As he went up the tunnel they were close at his heels, and in the dancing uncertain glow he could not be sure whether they walked as a man walks or crawled as a snake crawls. He had a vague impression that their gait was hideously compounded of both. He swerved far aside to avoid the sprawling bulk that had been Saul Fletcher, and so, with his gun muzzle pressed hard against the shining brittle image borne in his left hand, he

came to the short flight of steps which led up to the secret door. There they came to a standstill. He turned to face them. They ringed him in a close half-circle, and he understood that they feared to open the secret door lest he dash out through the cavern into the sunlight, where they could not follow, with their image. Nor would he set down the god until the door was opened.

At last they withdrew several yards, and he cautiously set the image on the floor at his feet where he could snatch it up in an instant. How they opened the door he never knew, but it swung wide, and he backed slowly up the steps, his gun trained on the glittering god. He had almost reached the door–one back-thrown hand gripped the edge–the light went out suddenly and the rush came. A volcanic burst of effort shot him backward through the door which was already rushing shut. As he leaped he emptied his gun full into the fiendish faces that suddenly filled the dark opening. They dissolved in red ruin and as he raced madly from the outer cavern he heard the soft closing of the secret door, shutting that realm of horror from the human world.

In the glow of the westering sun John Reynolds staggered drunkenly, clutching at the stones and trees as a madman clutches at realities. The keen tenseness that had held him when he fought for his life fell from him and left him a quivering shell of disrupted nerves. An insane titter drooled involuntarily through his lips, and he rocked to and fro in ghastly laughter he could not check.

Then the clink of hoofs on stone sent him leaping behind a cluster of boulders. It was some hidden instinct which led him to take refuge. His conscious mind was too dazed and chaotic for thought or action.

Into the clearing rode Jonas McCrill and his followers and a sob tore through Reynolds' throat. At first he did not recognize them–did not realize that he had ever seen them before. The feud, with all other sane and normal things, lay lost and forgotten far back in dim vistas beyond the black tunnels of madness.

Two figures rode from the other side of the clearing–Bill Ord and one of the outlaw followers of the McCrills. Strapped to Ord's saddle were several

sticks of dynamite, done into a compact package.

“Well, gee whiz,” hailed young Ord, “I shore didn’t expect to meet yuh-all here. Did yuh git him?”

“Naw,” snapped old Jonas, “he’s done fooled us again. We come up with his horse, but he wasn’t on hit.

The rein was snapped like he’d had hit tied and it’d broke away. I dunno where he is, but we’ll git him.

I’m a-goin’ on to Antelope to git some more of the boys. Yuh-all git Saul’s body outa that cave and foller me as fast as yuh can.”

He reined away and vanished through the trees, and Reynolds, his heart in his mouth, saw the other four approach the cavern.

“Well, by God!” exclaimed Jack Solomon fiercely. “Somebody’s done been here! Look! Them rocks are tore down!”

John Reynolds watched as one paralyzed. If he sprang up and called to them they would shoot him down before he could voice his warning. Yet it was not that which held him as in a vise; it was sheer horror which robbed him of thought and action and froze his tongue to the roof of his mouth. His lips parted but no sound came forth. As in a nightmare he saw his enemies disappear into the cavern. Their voices, muffled, came back to him.

“By golly, Saul’s gone!”

“Look here, boys, here’s a door in the back wall!”

“By thunder, it’s open!”

“Let’s take a look!”

Suddenly from within the bowels of the hills crashed a fusillade of shots–a burst of hideous screams. Then silence closed like a clammy fog over the Valley of the Lost.

John Reynolds, finding voice at last, cried out as a wounded beast cries, and beat his temples with his clenched fists, which he brandished to the heavens, shrieking wordless blasphemies.

Then he ran staggeringly to Bill Ord's horse which grazed tranquilly with the others beneath the trees.

With clammy hands he tore away the package of dynamite and, without separating the sticks, he punched a hole in the end of the middle stick with a twig. Then he cut a short–a very short–piece of fuse, and slipped a cap over one end which he inserted into the hole in the dynamite. In a pocket of the rolled-up slicker bound behind the saddle he found a match, and lighting the fuse he hurled the bundle into the cavern. Hardly had it struck the back wall when with an earthquake roar it exploded.

The concussion nearly hurled him off his feet. The whole mountain rocked and with a thunderous crash the cave roof fell and tons and tons of shattered rock crashed down to obliterate all marks of Ghost Cave, and to shut the door to the pits forever.

John Reynolds walked slowly away, and suddenly the whole horror swept upon him and the earth seemed hideously alive under his feet, the sun foul and blasphemous over his head. The light was sickly, yellowish and evil, and all things were polluted by the unholy knowledge locked in his skull, like hidden drums beating ceaselessly in the blackness beneath the hills.

He had closed one Door forever but what other nightmare shapes might lurk in hidden places and the dark pits of the earth, gloating over the souls of men? His knowledge was a reeking blasphemy which would never let him rest, for ever in his soul would whisper the drums that throbbed in those dark pits where lurked demons that had once been men. He had looked on ultimate foulness, and his knowledge was a taint because of which he could never stand clean before men again or touch the flesh of any living thing without a shudder. If man, molded of divinity, could sink to such verminous obscenities, who could contemplate his eventual destiny unshaken? And if such beings as the Old People existed, what other horrors might not lurk beneath the visible surface of the universe? He was suddenly aware that he had glimpsed the grinning skull beneath the mask of life and that that

glimpse made life intolerable. All certainty and stability had been swept away, leaving a mad welter of lunacy, nightmare and stalking horror.

John Reynolds drew his gun and his horny thumb drew back the heavy hammer. Thrusting the muzzle against his temple, he pulled the trigger. The shot crashed echoing through the hills and the last of the fighting Reynoldses pitched headlong.

Old Jonas McCrill, galloping back at the sound of the blast, found him where he lay, and wondered that his face should be that of an old, old man, his hair white as hoar-frost.

The Hoofed Thing

Marjory was crying over the loss of Bozo, her fat Maltese who had failed to appear after his usual nightly prowl. There had been a peculiar epidemic of feline disappearances in the neighborhood recently, and Marjory was disconsolate. And because I never could stand to see Marjory cry, I sallied forth in search of the missing pet, though I had little hope of finding him. Every so often some human pervert gratifies his sadistic mania by poisoning animals of which people are fond, and I was certain that Bozo and the score or more of his kind which had vanished in the past few months had fallen victims to some such degenerate.

Leaving the lawn of the Ash home, I crossed several vacant weed-grown lots and came to the last house on that side of the street–a run-down, rambling estate which had recently been occupied–though not rejuvenated–by a Mr. Stark, a lonely, retiring sort of a man from the East. Glancing at the rambling old house, rising among the great oak trees and set back a hundred yards or so from the street, it occurred to me that Mr. Stark might possibly be able to cast some light on the present mystery.

I turned into the sagging, rusty iron gate and went up the cracked walk, noting the general dilapidation of the place. Little was known about the owner, and though he had been a neighbor of mine for some six months, I had never seen him at close range. It was rumored that he lived alone, even without servants, though he was a cripple. An eccentric scholar of taciturn nature and with money to indulge his whims, was the general opinion.

The wide porch, half covered with ivy, crossed the whole front of the house and flanked both sides. As I prepared to lift the old-fashioned door knocker, I heard a limping, dragging step and turned to face the owner of the house who came hobbling about the corner of the porch. He was a striking figure, despite his deformity. His face was that of an ascetic and a thinker, with a high magnificent forehead, heavy black brows that almost met, and shaded deep dark eyes, piercing and magnetic. His nose was thin and high-bridged, hooked like the beak of some bird of prey, his lips were thin and firmly set, his jaw massive and jutting, almost brutal in its lines of uncompromising resolution. He was not a tall man, even had he stood erect, but his thick short neck and massive shoulders promised power denied by his posture. For he moved slowly and with apparent difficulty, leaning on a crutch, and I saw that one leg was drawn up in an abnormal way, and on the foot he wore a shoe such as is worn on a club-foot.

He looked at me inquiringly and I said, “Good morning, Mr. Stark, sorry to have troubled you. I’m Michael Strang. I live in the last house on the other side of the street. I just dropped in to learn if you’d seen anything of a big Maltese cat recently.”

His eyes bored into me.

“What makes you think I might know anything about a cat?” he asked in a deep-timbered voice.

“Nothing,” I confessed, feeling rather foolish. “It’s my fiance’s cat, though, and she’s broken-hearted over losing it. As you’re her closest neighbor on this side, I thought there was a bare chance that you might have seen the animal.”

“I understand,” he smiled pleasantly. “No, I’m very sorry I can’t help you. I heard some cats caterwauling among my trees last night–in fact, I heard them too distinctly, for I had one of my spells of insomnia–but I’ve seen nothing of the cat you mention. I am sorry to hear of its loss. Won’t you come in?”

Rather curious to know more of my neighbor, I accepted his invitation and he showed me into a study redolent of tobacco and book leather. I glanced

curiously at the volumes which lined the walls to the ceiling, but had no opportunity to examine their titles, as my host proved surprisingly talkative. He seemed glad of my call and I knew that his visitors were very rare, if any at all. I found him a highly cultured man, a charming conversationalist, and a most courteous host. He produced whiskey-and-soda from an antique lacquered cabinet whose door seemed to consist of a highly-polished, solid silver plate, and as we sipped our drinks he talked of various subjects in a most interesting manner. Learning from a chance remark that I was deeply interested in the anthropological researches of Professor Hendryk Brooler, he discussed the subject at some length and clarified several points on which I was extremely hazy.

Fascinated by the man's evident erudition, it was nearly an hour before I could tear myself away, though I felt exceedingly guilty when I thought of poor Marjory waiting for news of the missing Bozo. I took my departure, promising to return soon, and as I went out the front door, it occurred to me that, after all, I had learned nothing about my host. He had carefully kept the conversation in impersonal channels. I also decided that though he knew nothing about Bozo, the presence of a cat in the house might be an advantage. Several times as we talked, I had heard the scampering of something overhead, though on second thought the noise had not particularly resembled the movements of rodents. It had sounded more like a tiny kid or lamb, or some other small hoofed animal, walking across the floor.

A thorough search of the neighborhood revealing no trace of the missing Bozo, I reluctantly returned to Marjory, bearing, as a partial consolation, a waddling, bench-legged bulldog with a face like a gargoyle and as loyal a heart as ever beat in a canine breast. Marjory wept over the lost cat and christened her new vassal Bozo in memory of the departed, and I left her romping with him on the lawn as if she had been ten instead of twenty.

The memory of my conversation with Mr. Stark remained very vivid in my mind and I visited him again next week. Again I was impressed at the deep and varied knowledge which was his. I purposely led the conversation into many different channels, and in each he showed himself master of the subject, going a little deeper into each than I had ever heard anyone go.

Science, the arts, economics, philosophy, he was equally versed in all of them. Charmed as I was by his flow of conversation, I nevertheless found myself listening for the curious noise I had heard before, and I was not disappointed. Only this time the tapping sound was louder than before and I decided that his unknown pet was growing. Perhaps, I thought, he kept it in the house fearing it would meet the same fate as the vanished cats, and as I knew the house had no basement or cellar, it was natural that he would keep it in some attic room. A lonely and friendless man, it was probable that he felt a great deal of affection for it, whatever it might be.

We talked late into the night, and indeed, it was nearing dawn before I forced myself to take my leave.

As before, he urged me to repeat the visit soon. He apologized for his inability to return my call, as he said his infirmity prevented his doing more than limp about his estate for a little exercise early in the morning before the heat of the day set in.

I promised to call again soon, but in spite of my desire to do so, business prevented me for some weeks, during which time I became aware of one of those minor neighborhood mysteries which occasionally spring up in some restricted locality, usually to die away unsolved. Dogs, hitherto unmolested by the unknown destroyer of the cats, now began to vanish likewise and their owners were in constant fury.

Marjory picked me up in her little roadster as I was walking up from town, and I knew something had occurred to upset her. Bozo, her constant companion, grinned dragonishly at me and jovially lapped my face with a long wet tongue.

“Somebody tried to kidnap Bozo last night, Michael,” she said, her deep dark eyes shadowed with worry and indignation. “I just bet it was the horrid beast who’s been doing away with people’s pets–”

She gave me the details and it appeared that the mysterious prowler had found Bozo too much of a handful. The family had heard a sudden uproar late in the night, and the sound of a savage struggle, mingled with the maddened roaring of the big dog. They sallied forth and arrived at Bozo’s

kennel, just too late to apprehend the visitor whose sounds of flight they distinctly heard. The dog was straining his chain, his eyes blazing, every hair on his body standing on end, and his deep throat thundering his defiance. But of the attacker there was no trace; he had evidently broken away and escaped over the high garden wall.

I think the incident must have made Bozo suspicious toward strangers, for it was only the next morning that I was called on to rescue Mr. Stark from him.

As I have said, the Stark house was the last one on his side of the street, and mine was the last on my side. It was, in fact, the last house on the street, lying some three hundred yards from the lower corner of Stark's wide, tree-covered lawn. On the other corner that faced the street–the corner toward the Ash home–there stood a grove of small trees in one of the vacant lots which separated the Stark estate from the Ash place. As I was passing this grove on my way to the Ash home, I heard a sudden outcry–a man's voice shouting for help and the infuriated snarling of a dog.

Plunging through the clump I saw a huge dog leaping repeatedly up at a figure which clung to the lower branches of one of the trees. The dog was Bozo and the man was Mr. Stark, who, in spite of his crippled condition, had managed to scramble up into the tree just out of reach. Horrified and astounded, I sprang to the rescue and hauled Bozo away from his intended victim with some difficulty and sent him sulkily homeward. I sprang to assist Mr. Stark out of the tree, and hardly had he touched the earth when he collapsed completely.

However, I could find no sign of injury on him, and he breathlessly assured me–between gasps–that he was quite all right except for the shock of fright and exhaustion. He said that he was resting in the shade of the grove, having tired himself by too long a walk about his estate, when the dog suddenly appeared and attacked him. I apologized profusely for Bozo, assured him it would not happen again, and helped him to his study where he reclined on a divan and sipped a whiskey-and-soda which I prepared for him from ingredients found in the lacquered cabinet. He was very reasonable about the matter, assured me that no harm had been done, and attributed the attack to the fact that he was a stranger to the dog.

Suddenly, as he talked, I again heard the tap-tap of hoofs upstairs, and I was startled; the sound was so much heavier than before, though somewhat muffled. It was such a sound as a yearling might make walking about over a rug-covered floor. My curiosity was so much aroused I could hardly keep from inquiring as to the source of the noise, but naturally refrained from such presumption, and feeling that Mr.

Stark needed rest and quiet, I left as soon as he was comfortable.

It was about a week later that the first of the blood-chilling mysteries took place. Again it was an unexplained disappearance, but this time it was no cat or dog. It was a three-year-old tot who was seen playing in a lot near its own yard just before sun-down, and was seen no more by mortal eyes. No need to say that the town was up in alarm. Some people had thought to see a malevolent meaning behind the disappearance of the animals, and now this pointed indisputably to some sinister hand working out of sight.

The police scoured town and country, but no trace of the missing child was found, and before the fortnight was over, four more had vanished in various parts of the city. Their families received no letters demanding ransom, no sign of any hidden enemy taking this revenge. The silence simply yawned and swallowed the victims and remained unbroken. Frantic people appealed to the civil authorities in vain, since they had done all they could and were as helpless as the public.

There was talk of asking the governor to send soldiers to patrol the city, and men began to go armed and to hasten back to their families long before nightfall. Dark whispers of supernatural agencies began to make the rounds, and folk said forebodingly that no mortal man could so snatch away children and remain unsuspected and unknown. But there was no insurmountable mystery in their abducting. It was impossible to patrol every inch of a large city and to keep an eye always on every child. They played in the lonely parks and stayed out until after dusk at work or play, despite warnings and commands, and ran home through the gathering darkness. It was no supernatural thing for the unknown kidnapper, skulking in the shadows, to reach an arm from among the trees or bushes of park or playground and snatch a child strayed from its playmates. Even on lonely streets and dim back-alleys the thing could be done. The horror lay, not so

much in the method of stealing, but in the fact that they were stolen. No sane or normal motive seemed to lie behind it all. An aura of fear hung like a pall over the city, and through this pall shot an icy wave of shuddering horror.

In one of the more secluded parks near the outskirts of the city, a young couple, indulging in what is popularly known as a “petting party,” were frozen by a terrible scream from a black clump of trees, and not daring to move, saw a stooped and shadowy figure emerge, bearing on its back the unmistakable body of a man. The horror vanished among the trees, and the couple, frenzied with terror, started their auto and raced wildly for the lights of town. They tremblingly gasped out their story to the chief of police and in a short time a cordon of patrolmen had been thrown about the park. But it was too late; the unknown murderer had made good his–or its–escape. In the grove from which the slayer had been seen to emerge was found a disreputable old hat, crumpled and blood-stained, and one of the officers recognized it as one which had been worn by a vagabond picked up by him the day before and subsequently released. The wretch must have been sleeping in the park when doom fell upon him.

But no other clue was found. The hard springy soil and thick grass gave up no footprint, and the mystery was as much a mystery as ever. And now the fear that hung over the whole city grew almost unbearable in its intensity. I often thought of Mr. Stark, living alone and crippled in that sombre old house, practically isolated, and often feared for him, I made it a point to drop by his place almost every day to assure myself that he was safe. These visits were very brief. Mr. Stark seemed preoccupied, and though he was affable enough, I felt it better not to intrude myself upon him. I did not, indeed, enter his house at all during this period, as I invariably found him hobbling about the lawn or reclining in a hammock between two great oak trees. Either his infirmity was troubling him more than usual, or the horrid mystery which hung over the town had affected him likewise. He seemed tired most of the time, and his eyes were deeply shadowed as if from mental stress or physical weariness.

A few days after the disappearance of the tramp, the city authorities warned all citizens to be on their guard, as, calculating from past events, it was

feared that the unknown killer would strike again soon, possibly that night. The police force had been increased to nearly twice its regular number, and a score of citizens were sworn in as special deputies. Grim-faced men patrolled the streets heavily armed, and as night fell, a suffocating tension settled over the whole city.

It was shortly after dark when my telephone rang. It was Stark.

“I wonder if you’d mind coming over,” he said, and his voice sounded rather apologetic. “My cabinet door is jammed and I can’t get it open. I wouldn’t have bothered you, but it’s too late to get a workman here to open it–all the shops are closed. My sleeping powders are in the cabinet, and if I can’t get them, I’ll spend a wretched night; I feel all the symptoms of an attack of insomnia.”

“I’ll be right over,” I promised.

A brisk walk took me to his door, where he let me in with much apologies.

“I’m frightfully sorry to have caused you all this trouble,” he said, “but I haven’t the physical strength to pry the door open, and without my sleeping powders, I’d toss and tumble the whole night through.”

There was no electric wiring in his house, but several large candles on the table shed sufficient light. I bent before the lacquered cabinet and began to wrestle with the door. I have mentioned the silver plate of which the door appeared to be made. As I worked my gaze fell on this plate which was so highly polished it reflected objects like a mirror. And suddenly my blood chilled. Over my shoulder I saw the reflected countenance of John Stark, unfamiliar and hideously distorted. He held a mallet in his hand which he lifted as he stealthily approached me. I rose suddenly, wheeling to face him. His face was as inscrutable as ever, except for an expression of faint surprise at my abruptness. He extended the mallet.

“Perhaps you might use this,” he suggested.

I took it without a word, still keeping my eyes on him, and striking one terrific blow, literally burst the cabinet door open. His eyes widened in

surprise, and for a moment we faced each other unspeaking.

There was an electric tenseness in the air, then above my head I heard again the clumping of hoofs. And a strange chill, like a nameless fright, stole over me–for I could have sworn that it was nothing smaller than a horse which tramped about in the rooms overhead!

Throwing the mallet aside, I turned without a word and hastened out of the house, nor did I breathe entirely easy until I had gained my own library. There I sat pondering, my mind a chaotic jumble. Had I made a fool of myself? Had not that look of fiendish craft on John Stark's face as he stole up behind me been merely a distortion of reflection? Had my imagination run away with me? Or–and here dark fears whispered at the back of my brain–had the reflection in that silver plate been all that saved my life? Was John Stark a madman? I shook with a ghastly thought. Was it he who was responsible for the recent detestable crimes? The theory was untenable. What possible reason could a refined, elderly scholar have in abducting children and murdering tramps? Again my fears whispered that there might be a motive–whispered shuddersomely of a ghastly laboratory where a crazed scientist carried out horrible experiments with human specimens.

Then I laughed at myself. Even supposing John Stark to be a madman, the recent crimes were physically beyond his power. Only a man of almost superhuman strength and agility could carry off strong young children soundlessly and bear the corpse of a murdered man on his shoulders. Certainly no cripple could do it, and it was up to me to go back to Mr. Stark's house and apologize for my foolish actions–and then a sudden thought struck me like a dash of ice-cold water–something which at the time had impressed itself on my subconscious mind, but which I had not consciously noticed–when I had turned to face John Stark before the lacquered cabinet, he had been standing upright, without his crutch.

With a bewildered shake of my head, I dismissed the matter from my mind and, picking up a book, settled myself to read. The volume, selected at random, was not one calculated to rid my mind of haunting shadows. It was the extremely rare Dusseldorf edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*, called the Black Book, not because of its iron-clasped leather bindings, but because of its dark contents.

Opening the volume at random, I began idly to read the chapter on the summoning of daemons out of the Void. More than ever I sensed a deep and sinister wisdom behind the author's incredible assertions as I read of the unseen worlds of unholy dimensions which Von Junzt maintains press, horrific and dimly guessed, on our universe, and of the blasphemous inhabitants of those Outer Worlds, which he maintains at times burst terribly through the Veil at the bidding of evil sorcerers, to blast the brains and feast on the blood of men.

Reading, I drowsed, and from my doze awoke with a cold fear lying upon my soul like a cloud. I had dreamed fitfully and in my dream I had heard Marjory calling to me faintly, as if from across misty and terrible abysses, and in her voice was a blood-freezing fear as if she were menaced by some horror beyond all human understanding. I found myself shaking as with ague and cold sweat stood upon my body as in a nightmare.

Taking up the telephone, I called up the Ash home. Mrs. Ash answered and I asked to speak to Marjory.

Her voice came back over the wire tinged with anxiety, "Why, Michael, Marjory has been gone for more than an hour! I heard her talking over the phone, and then she told me you wanted her to meet you by the grove on the corner of the Stark place, to take a ride. I thought it was funny that you didn't drive by the house as you always do, and I didn't like the idea of her going out alone, but I supposed you knew best–you know we always put so much faith in you, Michael–so I let her go. You don't think–anything–anything–"

"Oh no!" I laughed, but my laughter was hollow, my throat dry. "Nothing's happened, Mrs. Ash. I'll bring her home, right away."

As I hung up the receiver and turned away, I heard a sound outside the door–a scratching sound accompanied by a low whimper. Such a small thing can be vested with unknown fear at times–my hair prickled and my tongue clove to my palate. Expecting to see I knew not what, I flung open the door. A cry broke from my lips as a dusty, blood-stained shape limped in and staggered against my legs. It was Marjory's dog, Bozo. He had

evidently been brutally beaten. One ear was split open and his hide had been bruised and torn in half a dozen places.

He seized my trouser leg and pulled me toward the door, growling deep in his throat. My mind a seething hell, I prepared to follow him. The thought of a weapon entered my mind, and at the same instant I remembered I had loaned my revolver to a friend who feared to traverse the streets at night unarmed.

My gaze fell upon a great broadsword hanging on the wall. The weapon had been in the family for eight centuries and had let blood on many a battlefield since it first hung at the girdle of a Crusading ancestor.

I tore it from the scabbard where it had rested undisturbed for a hundred years and the cold blue steel glimmered unstained in the light. Then I followed the growling dog into the night. He ran staggeringly but swiftly, and I was hard put to keep up with him. He went in the direction my inmost intuition had told me he would go–toward the house of John Stark.

We approached the corner of the Stark estate and I caught Bozo's collar and drew him back, as he started across the crumbling wall. I knew enough. John Stark was the fiend incarnate who had laid the cloud of terror over the city. I recognized the technique–a telephone call which lured the victim forth. I had walked into his trap, but chance had intervened. So he had chosen the girl–it would not be difficult to imitate my voice. Homicidal maniac or crazy experimenter, whatever he might be, I knew that somewhere in that dark house Marjory lay, a captive or a corpse. And I did not intend that Stark should have the opportunity to shoot me down as I walked in upon him openly. A black fury gripped me, bringing with it the craft that extreme passion often brings. I was going into that dark house, and I was going to hew John Stark's head from his body with the blade that in old times had severed the necks of Saracens and pirates and traitors.

Ordering Bozo to keep behind me, I turned from the street and went swiftly and cautiously along the side wall until I was even with the back part of the house. A glow above the trees to the east warned me that the moon was coming up, and I wished to get into the house before the light might betray me to any watcher. I climbed the tumble-down wall, and with Bozo

following me like a shadow, I crossed the lawn, keeping close under the shadows of the trees.

Silence gripped the dark house as I stole up upon the rear porch, my blade ready. Bozo sniffed at the door and whined deep in his throat. I crouched, waiting for anything. I knew not what peril lurked in that mysterious unlighted building, or whether I was daring one lone madman or a gang of murderers. I lay no claim to courage, but the black rage in my brain swept all thought of personal fear away. I tried the door cautiously. I was not very familiar with the house, but believed the door led into a store-room. It was locked on the inside. I drove my sword-point between the door and the jamb and pried, carefully but powerfully. There was no such thing as breaking the ancient blade, forged with forgotten craft, and as I exerted all my strength, which is not inconsiderable, something had to give. It was the old-fashioned lock.

With a groan and crash that seemed horribly loud in the stillness, the door sagged open.

I strained my eyes into the utter blackness as I stole forward. Bozo passed me silently and vanished in the gloom. Utter silence reigned, then the clink of a chain sent a chill of nameless fear through me. I swung about, hair bristling, sword lifted–and then I heard the muffled sound of a woman sobbing.

I dared to strike a match. Its flare showed me the great dusty room, piled high with nondescript junk–and showed me a pitiful girlish form crumpled in a corner. It was Marjory and Bozo was whining and licking her face. Stark was nowhere to be seen, and the one other door leading from the store-room was closed. I stepped to it quickly and slid the old-fashioned bolt. Then I lighted a stump of a candle which I found upon a table, and went quickly to Marjory. Stark might come in upon us unexpectedly through the outer door, but I trusted to Bozo to warn me of his coming. The dog showed no signs of nervousness or anger to indicate the near presence of a lurking enemy, but now and then he looked up toward the ceiling and growled deep and ominously.

Marjory was gagged and her hands tied behind her. A small chain about her slim waist shackled her to a heavy staple in the wall, but the key was in the lock. I freed her in an instant and she threw her arms convulsively about me, shaking as with an ague. Her wide dark eyes stared unseeingly into mine with a horror that shook my soul and froze my blood with a nameless grisly premonition.

“Marjory!” I panted. “What in God’s name has happened? Don’t be afraid. Nothing shall harm you.

Don’t look like that! In Heaven’s name, girl–”

“Listen!” she whispered shuddering. “The tramp–the terrible tramp of the hoofs!”

My head jerked up, and Bozo, every bristle on end, cringed, sheer terror blazing in his eyes. Above our heads sounded the clomping of hoofs. But now the footfalls were gigantic–elephantine. The house trembled to their impact. A cold hand touched my spine.

“What is it, in God’s name?” I whispered.

She clung closer to me.

“I don’t know! I dare not try to guess! We must go! We must run away! *It* will come down for us– *it* will burst *its* prison. For hours I’ve listened to it–”

“Where is Stark?” I muttered.

“Up–up there!” she shuddered. “I’ll tell you quickly–then we must run! I thought your voice sounded strange when you called me up, but I came to meet you, as I thought. I brought Bozo with me because I was afraid to go out in the dark alone. Then when I was in the shadow of the grove, something sprang upon me. Bozo roared and leaped, but he struck him down with a heavy club and struck him again and again as he lay writhing in the dust. All the time I was struggling and trying to scream, but the creature had gripped my throat with a great gorilla-like hand, and I was

half-strangled. Then he flung me over his shoulder and carried me through the grove and across the wall into the Stark estate. I was only half-conscious and it was not until he had brought me into this room that I saw it was John Stark. But he did not limp and he moved with the agility of a great ape. He was dressed in dark close-fitting garments which blended so well with the darkness as to render him almost invisible.

“He gagged me while I pleaded in vain for mercy, and bound my hands. Then he chained me to the wall, but left the key in the lock as if he intended taking me away soon. I believe he was mad–and afraid, too.

There was an unearthly blaze in his eyes and his hands shook as with palsy. He said, ‘You wonder why I have brought you here? I will tell you, because what you know will not matter anyhow, since within an hour you will be beyond all knowledge!

“‘Tomorrow the papers will scream in headlines that the mysterious kidnapper has struck again, under the very noses of the police! Well, they’ll soon have more to worry them than an occasional disappearance, I fear. A weaker personality than mine might well feel some vanity in outwitting the authorities as I have done–but it has been so easy to evade the stupid fools. My pride is fed on greater things. I planned well. When I brought the *thing* into being, I knew it would need food–much food. That is why I came out where I was not known and feigned lameness and weakness, I who have the strength of a giant in my thews. None has suspected me–unless it is Michael Strang. Tonight I read doubt in his eyes–I should have struck anyhow, when he turned to face me–should have taken the chance of mortal combat with him, powerful as he is–

“‘You do not understand. I see in your eyes that you do not understand. But I will try to make you understand. Men think I am deeply cultured; little do they guess how deep my knowledge is. I have gone further than any man in the arts and sciences. They were toys for paltry brains, I found. I went deeper. I experimented with the occult as some men experiment with science. I found that by certain grim and ancient arts a wise man could tear aside the Veil between the universes and bring unholy shapes into this terrestrial plane. I set to work to prove this thing. You might ask me, why? Why does any scientist make experiments? The proving of the theory is

reason enough–the acquiring of knowledge is the end that justifies the means. Your brain would wither and crumble away were I to describe to you the incantations and spells and strange propitiations with which I drew a mewling, squalling, naked *thing* out of the Void.

"'It was not easy. For months I toiled and studied, delving deep into the ungodly lores of blasphemous books and musty manuscripts. Groping in the blind dark Outer chasms into which I had projected my bodiless will, I first *felt* the existence and presence of unhallowed beings, and I worked to establish contact with them–to draw one, at least, into this material universe. For long I could only feel *it* touching the dark borderlands of my own consciousness. Then with grim sacrifices and ancient rituals, I drew it across the gulfs. First it was but a vast anthropomorphic shadow cast upon a wall. I saw its progression from nothingness into the mold and being of this material sphere. I saw when its eyes burned in the shadow, and when the atoms of its nonterrestrial substance swirled and changed and clarified and shrank, and in shrinking, crystallized and became matter as we know it.

"'And there on the floor before me lay the mewling, squalling, naked thing from out the Abyss, and when I saw its nature, even I blenched and my resolution almost failed me.

"'At first it was no bigger than a toad. But I fed it carefully, knowing that it would thrive only on fresh blood. To begin with I fed it living flies and spiders, insects which draw blood from other things. At first it grew slowly–but it grew. I increased its food. I fed it mice–rats–rabbits; then cats. Finally a full-grown dog was none too large a meal for it.

"'I saw where this was leading, but I was determined not to be balked. I stole and gave it a human infant, and after that it would touch no other food. Then for the first time, a thrill of fear touched my soul. The thing began to grow and expand appallingly on its feasts of human blood. I began to fear it. I no longer looked upon it with pride. No longer I delighted in watching it feed upon the prey I caught for it. But now I found I was caught in a trap of my own making. When even temporarily deprived of its food, the thing grew dangerous to me. It demanded its food oftener; I was forced to take desperate chances to obtain that food.

“‘Tonight by the barest chance, your lover escaped the fate which has befallen you. I hold Michael Strang no ill-will. Necessity is a cruel taskmaster. I will take no pleasure in laying you, alive and writhing, before the monster. But I have no other choice. To save myself, I must continue to gorge it on human blood, lest it take me for its prey. You might ask me, why do I not destroy that which I have created? It is a question I ask myself. I dare not try. I doubt if human hands can slay it. My mind is no longer my own. I, who was once its master, am become no more than a slave to provide it food. Its terrible non-human intelligence has robbed me of my will-power and enslaved me. Come what may, I must continue to feed it!

“‘It may keep on growing until it bursts its prison and stalks slavering and ravening forth into the world.

Each time it has fed of late, it has grown spans in height and girth. There may be no limit to its growth.

But I dare not refuse it the food it craves.’

“Here he started as the house trembled to the impact of a great lumbering tread somewhere upstairs. He turned pale. ‘It has awakened and is hungry!’ he hissed. ‘I will go to it–tell it it is too soon to be fed!’ He took the candle which was burning on the table and hurried away, and I heard him ascend the stairs–”

she sunk her face in her hands and a shudder shook her slim frame.

“One terrible scream burst forth,” she whimpered, “then silence, save for a hideous rending, crunching sound, and the tramp–tramp–tramp of the terrible hoofs! I lay here–it seemed for ages. Once I heard a dog whining and scratching at the outer door and knew that Bozo had recovered consciousness and followed me here, but I couldn’t call to him, and soon he went away–and I lay here alone–listening–listening–”

I shuddered as if a cold wind were blowing upon me from outer space. And I rose, gripping the ancient sword. Marjory sprang up and seized me with convulsive strength.

“Oh, Michael, let us go!”

“Wait!” I was in the grip of an unconquerable depriving urge. “Before I go I must see what hides in those upstairs rooms.”

She screamed and clung to me frantically.

“No, no, Michael! Oh, God, you don’t know what you’re saying! It is some terrible thing not of this earth–some ghastly being from *outside!* Human weapons cannot harm it. Don’t–don’t, for my sake, Michael, don’t throw away your life!”

I shook my head.

“This is not heroism, Marjory, nor is it mere curiosity. I owe it to the children–to the helpless people of this city. Did not Stark say something about the thing breaking out of its prison? No–I must go against it now, while it is cornered in this house.”

“But what can you do with your puny weapon?” she wailed, wringing her hands.

“I don’t know,” I answered, “but this I do know–that demoniac lust is no stronger than human hate, and that I will match this blade, which in old days slew witches and warlocks and vampires and werewolves, against the foul legions of Hell itself. Go! Take the dog and run home as fast as you can!”

And in spite of her protests and pleas, I disengaged her clinging arms and pushed her gently out the door, closing it in the face of her despairing wail. Then taking up the candle, I went swiftly into the hallway on which the store-room abutted. The stair showed dark and forbidding, a black well of shadows, and suddenly a faint draught of wind blew out the candle in my hand, and groping in my pockets, I found I had no matches to relight it. But the moon shone faintly through the small high-set windows, and in its dim light I went grimly up the dark stairs, driven irresistibly by some force stronger than fear, the sword of my warrior-ancestors gripped in my hands.

All the time overhead, those gargantuan hoofs blundered to and fro and their ponderous fall froze the very blood in my veins, and on my clammy flesh, cold sweat froze. I knew no earthly feet made those sounds. All the dim horror-ridden shadows beyond ancestral fears clawed and whispered at the back of my mind, all the vague phantasmal shapes that lurk in the subconsciousness rose titanic and terrible, all the dim racial memories of grisly prehistoric fears awoke to haunt me. Every reverberation of those lumbering footfalls roused, in the slumbering deeps of my soul, horrific, mist-veiled shapes of near-memory. But on I went.

The door at the head of the stairs was furnished with a snap lock–evidently within as well as without, since after I had drawn back the outer catch, the massive portal still held firm. And within I heard that elephantine tread. In a frenzy, lest my resolution give way to screaming black panic, I heaved up my sword and splintered the panels with three mighty blows. Through the ruins I stepped.

The whole upstairs space consisted of one great room, now faintly illuminated by the moonlight which streamed in through the heavily barred windows. The place was vast and spectral, with bars of white moonlight and floating oceans of shadow. And an involuntary, unhuman cry broke from my dry lips.

Before me stood the Horror. The moonlight illuminated vaguely a shape of nightmare and lunacy. Twice as tall as a man, its general outline was not unlike that of a human; but its gigantic legs terminated in huge hoofs and instead of arms, a dozen tentacles writhed like snakes about its huge bloated torso. Its color was a leprous, mottled reptilian hue, and the crowning horror came when it turned its loose slavering blood-stained jowls toward me and fixed me with its sparkling million-faceted eyes which glittered like bits of fire. There was nothing of the human about that pointed, malformed head–and God help me, there was nothing of the bestial either, as human beings understand the beasts. Tearing my eyes from that grisly head for the sake of my sanity, I was aware of another horror, intolerable in its unmistakable implication.

About those giant hoofs lay the dismembered and fang-torn fragments of a human body, and a bar of moonlight fell upon the severed head which lay

staring upward with glassy dead eyes of horror–the head of John Stark.

Fear can become so intense it defeats itself. Now as I stood frozen, and out of that shambles the ghastly fiend came lumbering toward me, my fear was swept away by a red blaze of berserker fury. Swinging up my sword I leaped to meet the horror and the whistling blade sheared off half its tentacles which fell to the floor, writhing like serpents.

With an abhorrent high-pitched squeal, the monster bounded high above my head and stamped terribly downward. The impact of those frightful hoofs shattered my upflung arm like matchwood and dashed me to the floor, and with a soul-shaking bellow of triumph the monster leaped ponderously upon me in a ghastly death-dance that made the whole building groan and sway. Somehow I twisted aside and escaped those thunderous hoofs, that else had hammered me into a red pulp, and rolling aside, gained my feet, one thought uppermost in my mind–drawn from the shapeless void and materialized into concrete substance, the fiend was vulnerable to material weapons. And with my one good hand I gripped the sword that a saint had blessed in old times against the powers of darkness, and the red wave of battle-lust surged over me.

The monster wheeled unwieldily toward me, and roaring a wordless warcry I leaped, whirling the great sword through the air with every ounce of my powerful frame behind it. And straight through the pulpy unstable bulk it sheared, so that the loathsome torso fell one way and the giant legs the other. Yet the creature was not dead, for it writhed toward me on its tentacles, rearing its ghastly head, its eyes blazing fearfully, its forked tongue spitting venom at me. I swung up my sword and struck again and again, hacking the monstrosity into bits, each of which squirmed and writhed as if endowed with separate life–until I had hewed the head into pieces, and then I saw the scattered bits changing in form and substance. There seemed to be no bones in the thing’s body. Except for the huge hard hoofs and the crocodile-like fangs, all was disgustingly flabby and pulpy, like a toad or a spider.

And now as I watched, I saw the fragments melt into a viscous black stenching fluid which flowed over the fragments of what had been John Stark. And in that black tide those fragments of flesh and bone crumbled

and dissolved, as salt melts in water, faded and vanished–became one with the black abhorrent pool which whirled and eddied in the center of the room, showing a million facets and gleams of light, like the burning eyes of a myriad huge spiders. And I turned and fled downstairs.

At the foot of the stairs I stumbled over a soft heap, and a familiar whine woke me from the mazes of unutterable horror into which I had fallen. Marjory had not obeyed me; she had returned to that house of horror. She lay at my feet in a dead faint, and Bozo stood faithfully over her. Aye, I doubt not, if I had lost that grim battle, he would have given up his life to save his mistress when the monster came lurching down the stairs. With a sob of horror I caught up the girl, crushing her limp form to me; then Bozo cringed and snarled, gazing up the moon-flecked stairs. And down these stairs I saw a black glittering tide flowing sluggishly.

I ran from that house as I would flee from Hell, but I halted in the old store-room long enough to sweep a hasty hand over the table where I had found the candles. Several burnt matches littered the table, but I found one unstruck. And I struck it hurriedly and tossed it blazing into a heap of dusty papers near the wall. The wood was old and dry; it caught quickly and burned fiercely.

And as, with Marjory and Bozo, I watched it burn, I at least knew what the awakened townspeople did not guess; that the horror which had hovered over the city and the countryside was vanishing in those flames–I most devoutly hope, forever.

The Noseless Horror

Abysses of unknown terror lie veiled by the mists which separate man’s everyday life from the uncharted and unguessed realms of the supernatural. The majority of people live and die in blissful ignorance of these realms–I say blissful, for the rending of the veil between the worlds of reality and of the occult is often a hideous experience. Once have I seen the veil so rent, and the incidents attendant thereto were burned so deeply into my brain that my dreams are haunted to this day.

The terrible affair was ushered in by an invitation to visit the estate of Sir Thomas Cameron, the noted Egyptologist and explorer. I accepted, for the man was always an interesting study, though I disliked his brutal manner and ruthless character. Owing to my association with various papers of a scientific nature, we had been frequently thrown together for several years, and I gathered that Sir Thomas considered me one of his few friends. I was accompanied on this visit by John Gordon, a wealthy sportsman to whom, also, an invitation had been extended.

The sun was setting as we came to the gate of the estate, and the desolate and gloomy landscape depressed me and filled me with nameless forebodings. Some miles away could be faintly seen the village at which we had detrained and between this, and on all sides, the barren moors lay stark and sullen. No other human habitation could be seen, and the only sign of life was some large fen bird flapping its lonely way inland. A cold wind whispered out of the east, laden with the bitter salt tang of the sea; and I shivered.

“Strike the bell,” said Gordon, his impatience betraying the fact that the repellent atmosphere was affecting him, also. “We can’t stand here all night.”

But at that moment the gate swung open. Let it be understood that the manor house was surrounded by a high wall which entirely enclosed the estate. It was at the front gate that we stood. As it opened, we looked down a long driveway flanked by dense trees, but our attention at the present was riveted on the bizarre figure which stood to one side to let us pass. The gate had been opened by a tall man in Oriental dress. He stood like a statue, arms folded, head inclined in a manner respectful, but stately. The darkness of his skin enhanced the scintillant quality of his glittering eyes, and he would have been handsome save for a hideous disfiguration which at once robbed his features of comeliness and lent them a sinister aspect. He was noseless.

While Gordon and I stood silent, struck speechless by this apparition, the Oriental–a Sikh of India, by his turban–bowed and said in almost perfect English: “The master awaits you in his study, sahibs.”

We dismissed the lad who had brought us from the village, and, as his cart wheels rattled away in the distance, we started up the shadowed driveway, followed by the Indian with our bags. The sun had set as we waited at the gate, and night fell with surprising suddenness, the sky being heavily veiled by gray misty clouds. The wind sighed drearily through the trees on each side of the driveway and the great house loomed up in front of us, silent and dark except for a light in a single window. In the semi-darkness I heard the easy pad-pad of the Oriental's slippered feet behind us, and the impression was so like a great panther stealing upon his victim that a shudder shook me.

Then we had reached the door and were being ushered into a broad, dimly-lighted hallway, where Sir Thomas came striding forth to greet us.

"Good evening, my friends," his great voice boomed through the echoing house. "I have been expecting you! Have you dined? Yes? Then come into my study; I am preparing a treatise upon my latest discoveries and wish to have your advice on certain points. Ganra Singh!"

This last to the Sikh who stood motionless by. Sir Thomas spoke a few words to him in Hindustani, and, with another bow, the noseless one lifted our bags and left the hall.

"I've given you a couple of rooms in the right wing," said Sir Thomas, leading the way to the stairs. "My study is in this wing–right above this hall–and I often work there all night."

The study proved to be a spacious room, littered with scientific books and papers, and queer trophies from all lands. Sir Thomas seated himself in a vast armchair and motioned us to make ourselves comfortable. He was a tall, heavily-built man in early middle life, with an aggressive chin masked by a thick blond beard, and keen, hard eyes that smoldered with pent energy.

"I want your help as I've said," he began abruptly. "But we won't go into that tonight; plenty of time tomorrow, and both of you must be rather fatigued."

“You live a long way from anywhere,” answered Gordon. “What possessed you to buy and repair this old down-at-the-heels estate, Cameron?”

“I like solitude,” Sir Thomas answered. “Here I am not pestered with small brained people who buzz about one like mosquitoes about a buffalo. I do not encourage visitors here, and I have absolutely no means of communicating with the outside world. When I am in England I am assured of quiet in which to pursue my work here. I have not even any servants; Ganra Singh does all the work necessary.”

“That noseless Sikh? Who is he?”

“He is Ganra Singh. That’s all I know about him. I met up with him in Egypt and have an idea that he fled India on account of some crime. But that doesn’t matter; he’s been faithful to me. He says that he served in the Anglo-Indian army and lost his nose from the sweep of an Afghan tulwar in a border raid.”

“I don’t like his looks,” said Gordon bluntly. “You have a great deal of valuable trophies in this house; how can you be sure of trusting a man whom you know so little?”

“Enough of that,” Sir Thomas waved the matter aside with an impatient gesture. “Ganra Singh is all right; I never make mistakes in reading character. Let us talk of other things. I have not told you of my latest researches.”

He talked and we listened. It was easy to read in his voice the determination and ruthless driving power which made him one of the world’s foremost explorers and research men, as he told us of hardships endured and obstacles overcome. He had some sensational discoveries to disclose to the world, he said, and he added that the most important of his findings consisted of a most unusual mummy.

“I found it in a hitherto undiscovered temple far in the hinterlands of Upper Egypt, the exact location of which you shall learn tomorrow when we consult my notes together. I look to see it revolutionize history, for while I have not made a thorough examination of it, I have at least found that it is

like no other mummy yet discovered. Differing from the usual process of mummification, there is no mutilation at all.

The mummy is a complete body with all parts intact just as the subject was in life. Allowing for the fact that the features are dried and distorted with the incredible passage of time, one might imagine that he is looking upon a very ancient man who recently died, before disintegration has set in. The leathery lids are drawn down firmly over the eye sockets, and I am sure when I raise those lids I shall find the eyeballs intact beneath.

“I tell you, it is epoch making and overthrows all preconceived ideas! If life could by some manner be breathed into that withered mummy, it would be as able to speak, walk, and breathe as any man; for, as I said, its parts are as intact as if the man had died yesterday. You know the usual process–the disembowelling and so on–by which corpses are made mummies. But no such things have been done to this one. What would my colleagues not give to have been the finder! All Egyptologists will die from pure envy! Attempts have already been made to steal it–I tell you, many a research worker would cut my heart out for it!”

“I think you overvalue your find, and undervalue the moral senses of your co-workers,” said Gordon bluntly.

Sir Thomas sneered. “A flock of vultures, sir,” he exclaimed with a savage laugh. “Wolves! Jackals!

Sneaking about seeking to steal the credit from a better man! The laity have no real conception of the rivalry that exists in the class of their betters. It’s each man for himself–let everyone look to his own laurels, and to the devil with the weaker. Thus far I’ve more than held my own.”

“Even allowing this to be true,” retorted Gordon, “you have scant right to condemn your rivals’ tactics in the light of your own actions.”

Sir Thomas glared at his outspoken friend so furiously that I half expected him to commit bodily assault upon him; then the explorer’s mood changed, and he laughed mockingly and uproariously.

“The affair of Gustave Von Honmann is still on your mind, doubtless. I find myself the object of scathing denunciations wherever I go since that unfortunate incident. It is, I assure you, a matter of complete indifference to me. I have never desired the mob’s plaudits, and I ignore its accusations. Von Honmann was a fool and deserved his fate. As you know, we were both searching for the hidden city of Gomar, the finding of which added so much to the scientific world. I contrived to let a false map fall into his hands and sent him away on a wild goose chase into Central Africa.”

“You literally sent him to his death,” Gordon pointed out. “I admit that Von Honmann was something of a beast, but it was a rotten thing to do, Cameron. You knew that all the chances in the world were against him escaping death at the hands of the wild tribesmen into whose lands you sent him.”

“You can’t make me angry,” answered Cameron imperturbably. “That’s what I like about you, Gordon; you’re not afraid to speak out your mind. But let’s forget Von Honmann; he’s gone the way of all fools.

The one camp follower who escaped the general massacre and made his way back to civilization’s outpost said that Von Honmann, when he saw the game was up, realized the fraud and died swearing to avenge himself on me, living or dead, but that has never worried me. A man is living and dangerous, or dead and harmless; that’s all. But it’s growing late and doubtless you are sleepy; I’ll have Ganra Singh show you to your rooms. As for myself, I shall doubtless spend the rest of the night arranging the notes of my trip for tomorrow’s work.”

Ganra Singh appeared at the door like a giant phantom, and we said good night to our host and followed the Oriental. Let me here say that the house was built in shape like a double ended L. There were two stories and between the two wings was a sort of court upon which the lower rooms opened. Gordon and I had been assigned two bedrooms on the first floor in the left wing, which let into this court. There was a door between them, and, as I was preparing to retire, Gordon entered.

“Strange sort of a chap, isn’t he?” nodding across the court at the light which shone in the study window.

“A good deal of a brute, but a great brain, marvelous brain.”

I opened the door which let into the court for a breath of fresh air. The atmosphere in these rooms was crisp and sharp, but musky as if from unuse.

“He certainly doesn’t have many visitors.” The only light visible, besides those in our two rooms, was that in the upstairs study across the court.

“No.” Silence fell for a space; then Gordon spoke abruptly, “Did you hear how Von Honmann died?”

“No.”

“He fell into the hands of a strange and terrible tribe who claim descent from the early Egyptians. They are past masters at the hellish art of torture. The camp follower who escaped said that Von Honmann was killed slowly and fiendishly, in a manner which left him unmutilated, but shrunk and withered him until he was unrecognizable. Then he was sealed into a chest and placed in a fetish hut for a horrible relic and trophy.”

My shoulders twitched involuntarily. “Frightful!”

Gordon rose, tossed away his cigarette, and turned toward his room.

“Getting late, good night– *what was that?* ”

Across the court had come a faint crash as if a chair or table had been upset. As we stood, frozen by a sudden vague premonition of horror, a scream shuddered out across the night.

“Help! Help! Gordon! Slade! Oh God!”

Together we rushed out into the court. The voice was Sir Thomas’, and came from his study in the left wing. As we raced across the court, the sounds of a terrible struggle came clearly to us, and again Sir Thomas cried out like a man in his death agony: “He’s got me! Oh God, he’s got me!”

“Who is it, Cameron?” shouted Gordon desperately.

“Ganra Singh–” suddenly the straining voice broke short, and a wild gibbering came dimly to us as we rushed into the first door of the lower left wing and charged up the stairs. It seemed an Eternity before we stood at the door of the study, beyond which still came a bestial yammering. We flung open the door and halted, aghast.

Sir Thomas Cameron lay writhing in a growing pool of gore, but it was not the dagger sunk deep into his breast which held us in our tracks like men struck dead, but the hideous and evident insanity stamped on his face. His eyes flared redly, fixed on nothing, and they were the eyes of a man who is staring into Purgatory. A ceaseless gibbering burst from his lips, and then into his yammering was woven human words: “–Noseless–the noseless one–” Then a rush of blood burst from his lips, and he dropped on his face.

We bent over him and eyed each other in horror.

“Stone dead,” muttered Gordon. “But what killed him?”

“Ganra Singh–” I began; then both of us whirled. Ganra Singh stood silently in the doorway, his expressionless features giving no hint of his thoughts. Gordon rose, his hand sliding easily to his hip pocket.

“Ganra Singh, where have you been?”

“I was in the lower corridor, locking the house for the night. I heard my master call me, and I came.”

“Sir Thomas is dead. Do you have any idea as to who did the murder?”

“No, sahib. I am new to this English land; I do not know if my master had any enemies.”

“Help me lift him on this couch.” This was done. “Ganra Singh, you realize that we must hold you responsible for the time being.”

“While you hold me, the real killer may escape.”

Gordon did not reply to this. “Let me have the keys to the house.”

The Sikh obeyed without a word.

Gordon then led him across the outer corridor to a small room in which he locked him, first assuring himself that the window, as all the other windows in the house, was heavily barred. Ganra Singh made no resistance; his face showed nothing of his emotions. As we shut the door we saw him standing impassively in the center of the room, arms folded, eyes following us inscrutably.

We returned to the study with its shattered chairs and tables, its red stain on the floor, and the silent form on the couch.

“There’s nothing we can do until morning,” said Gordon. “We can’t communicate with anyone, and if we started out to walk to the village we should probably lose our way in the darkness and fog. It seems a pretty fair case against the Sikh.”

“Sir Thomas practically accused him in his last words.”

“As to that, I don’t know. Cameron shouted his name when I yelled, but he might have been calling the fellow–I doubt if Sir Thomas heard me. Of course, that remark about the ‘noseless one’ could seem to mean no one else, but it isn’t conclusive. Sir Thomas was insane when he died.”

I shuddered. “That, Gordon, is the most terrible phase of the matter. What was it that blasted Cameron’s reason and made of him a screaming maniac in the last few minutes he had to live?”

Gordon shook his head. “I can’t understand it. The mere fact of looking death in the eyes never shook Sir Thomas’ nerve before. I tell you, Slade, I believe there’s something deeper here than meets the eye.

This smacks of the supernatural, in spite of the fact that I was never a superstitious man. But let’s look at it in a logical light.

“This study comprises the whole of the upper left wing, being separated from the back rooms by a corridor which runs the whole length of the house. The only door of the study opens into that corridor.

We crossed the court, entered a lower room of the left wing, went into the hall into which we were first admitted, and came up the stairs into the upper corridor. The study door was shut, but not locked. And through that door came whatever it was that shattered Sir Thomas Cameron's brain before it murdered him. And the man–or thing–left the same way, for it is evident that nothing is concealed in the study, and the bars on the windows prohibit escape in that manner. Had we been a few moments quicker we might have seen the slayer leaving. The victim was still grappling with the fiend when I shouted, but between that instant and the moment we came into the upper corridor, there was time for the slayer, moving swiftly, to accomplish his design and leave the room. Doubtless he concealed himself in one of the rooms across the hall and either slipped out while we were bending over Sir Thomas and made his escape–or, if it were Ganra Singh, came boldly into the study."

"Ganra Singh came after us, according to his story. He should have seen anyone trying to escape from the rooms."

"The killer might have heard him coming and waited until he was in the study before emerging. Oh, understand, I believe the Sikh is the murderer, but we wish to be fair and look at the matter from every angle. Let's see that dagger."

It was a thin-bladed, wicked-looking Egyptian weapon, which I remembered having seen lying on Sir Thomas' table.

"It seems as if Ganra Singh's clothes would have been in disarray and his hands bloody," I suggested.

"He scarcely had time to cleanse himself and arrange his garments."

"At any rate," Gordon answered, "the fingerprints of the killer should be upon this dagger hilt. I have been careful not to obliterate any such traces, and I will lay the weapon on the couch here for the examination of a Bertillon expert. I am not adept in such matters myself. And in the meanwhile I think I'll go over the room, after the accepted manner of detectives, to look for any possible clues."

“And I’ll take a turn through the house. Ganra Singh may really be innocent, and the murderer lurking somewhere in the building.”

“Better be careful. If there is such a being, remember that it is a desperate man, quite ready and willing to do murder.”

I took up a heavy blackthorn and went out into the corridor. I forgot to say that all these corridors were dimly lighted, and the curtains drawn so closely that the whole house appeared to be dark from the outside. As I shut the door behind me, I felt more strongly than ever the oppressive silence of the house.

Heavy velvet hangings masked unseen doorways and, as a stray whisper of wind whipped them about, I started, and the lines from Poe flitted through my brain:

“And the silken, sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain Thrilled me, filled with fantastic terrors never felt before.”

I strode to the landing of the stair, and, after another glance at the silent corridors and the blank doors, I descended. I had decided that if any man had hidden in the upper story, he would have descended to the lower floor by this time, if indeed he had not already left the house. I struck a light in the lower reception hall, and went into the next room. The whole of the main building between the wings, I found, was composed of Sir Thomas’ private museum, a really gigantic room, filled with idols, mummy cases, stone and clay pillars, papyrus scrolls, and like objects. I wasted little time here, however, for as I entered my eyes fell upon something I knew to be out of place in some manner. It was a mummy case, very different from the other cases, and it was open! I knew instinctively that it had contained the mummy of which Sir Thomas had boasted that evening, but now it was empty. The mummy was gone.

Thinking of his words regarding the jealousy of his rivals, I turned hastily and made for the hall and the stair. As I did so, I thought I heard somewhere in the house a faint crashing. I had no desire, however, to further explore the building alone and armed only with a club. I wished to return and tell Gordon that we were probably opposed to a gang of international thieves. I

had started back toward the hall when I perceived a staircase leading directly from the museum room, and it I mounted, coming into the upper corridor near the right wing.

Again the long dim corridor ran away in front of me, with its blank mysterious doors and dark hangings. I must traverse the greater part of it in order to reach the study at the other end, and a foolish shiver shook me as I visualized hideous creatures lurking behind those closed doors. Then I shook myself. Whatever had driven Sir Thomas Cameron insane, it was human, and I gripped my blackthorn more firmly and strode down the corridor.

Then after a few strides I halted suddenly, the short hairs prickling at the back of my neck, and my flesh crawling unaccountably. I sensed an unseen presence, and my eyes turned as drawn by a magnet to some heavy tapestries which masked a doorway. There was no wind in the rooms, but *the hangings moved slightly!* I started, straining my eyes on the heavy dark fabric until it seemed the intensity of my gaze would burn through it, and I was aware, instinctively, that other eyes glared back. Then my eyes strayed to the wall beside the hidden doorway. Some freak of the vague light threw a dark formless shadow there, and, as I looked, it slowly assumed shape–a hideous distorted goblin image, grotesquely man-like, *and noseless!*

My nerve broke suddenly. That distorted figure might be merely the twisted shadow of a man who stood behind the hangings, but it was burned into my brain that, man, beast, or demon, those dark tapestries hid a shape of terrible and soul-shattering threat. A brooding horror lurked in the shadows and there in that silent darkened corridor with its vague flickering lights and that stark shadow hovering within my gaze, I came as near to insanity as I have ever come–it was not so much what met my eyes and senses, but the phantoms conjured up in my brain, the terrible dim images that rose at the back of my skull and gibbered at me. For I knew that for the moment the commonplace human world was far away, and that I was face to face with some horror from another sphere.

I turned and hurried down the corridor, my futile black thorn shaking in my grasp, and the cold sweat forming in great beads upon my brow. I reached the study and entered, closing the door behind me. My eyes turned

instinctively to the couch with its grim burden. Gordon leaned over some papers on a table, and he turned as I entered, his eyes alight with some suppressed excitement.

“Slade, I’ve found a map here drawn by Cameron, and, according to it, he found that mummy on the borders of the land where Von Honmann was murdered–”

“The mummy’s gone,” I said.

“Gone? By Jupiter! Maybe that explains it! A gang of scientific thieves! Likely Ganra Singh is in with them–let’s go talk to him.”

Gordon strode across the corridor, I following. My nerve was still shaken, and I had no use to discuss my recent experience. I must get back some of my courage before I could bring myself to put the fear I had felt into words. Gordon knocked at the door. Silence reigned. He turned the key in the lock, swung the door open, and swore. The room was empty! A door opening into another room parallel to the corridor showed how he had escaped. The lock had been fairly torn off.

“That was that noise I heard!” Gordon exclaimed. “Fool that I was, I was so engrossed in Sir Thomas’

notes that I paid no attention, thinking it was but the noise of your opening or closing a door! I’m a failure as a detective. If I had been on my guard I might have arrived on the scene before the prisoner made his getaway.”

“Lucky for you, you didn’t,” I answered shakily. “Gordon, let’s get out of here! Ganra Singh was lurking behind the hangings as I came up the corridor–I saw the shadow of his noseless face–and I tell you, the man’s not human. He’s an evil spirit! An inhuman goblin! Do you think a man could unhinge Sir Thomas’

reason–a human being? No, no, no! He’s a demon in human form–and I’m not so sure that the form’s human!”

Gordon's face was shadowed. "Nonsense! A hideous and unexplained crime has been perpetrated here tonight, but I will not believe that it cannot be explained in natural terms–listen!"

Somewhere down the corridor a door had opened and closed. Gordon leaped to the door, sprang through the passageway. Down the corridor I followed, cursing his recklessness, but fired by his example to a kind of foolhardy bravery. I had no doubt but that the end of that wild chase would be a death grapple with the inhuman Indian, and the shattered door lock was ample proof of his prowess, even without the gory form which lay in the silent study. But when a man like Gordon leads, what can one do but follow?

Down the corridor we sped, through the door where we had seen the thing vanish, through the dark room beyond, and into the next. The sounds of flight in front of us told us that we were pressing close upon our prey. The memory of that chase through darkened rooms is a vague and hazy dream–a wild and chaotic nightmare. I do not remember the rooms and passages which we traversed. I only know that I followed Gordon blindly and halted only when he stopped in front of a tapestry-hung doorway beyond which a red glow was apparent. I was mazed, breathless. My sense of direction was completely gone. I had no idea as to what part of the house we were in, or why that crimson glow pulsed beyond the hangings.

"This is Ganra Singh's room," said Gordon. "Sir Thomas mentioned it in his conversation. It is the extreme upper room of the right wing. Further he cannot go, for this is the only door to the room and the windows are barred. Within that room stands at bay the man–or whatever–killed Sir Thomas Cameron!"

"Then in God's name let us rush in upon him before we have time to reconsider and our nerve breaks!" I urged, and, shouldering past Gordon, I hurled the curtains aside…

The red glow at least was explained. A great fire leaped and flickered in the huge fireplace, lending a red radiance to the room. And there at bay stood a nightmarish and hellish form– *the missing mummy!*

My dazed eyes took in at one glance the wrinkled leathery skin, the sunken cheeks, the flaring and withered nostrils from which the nose had decayed away; the hideous eyes were open now, and they burned with a ghastly and demoniac life. A single glimpse was all I had, for in an instant the long lean thing came lurching headlong at me, a heavy ornament of some sort clutched in its lank and taloned hand. I struck once with the blackthorn and felt the skull give way, but it never halted–for who can slay the dead?–and the next instant I was down, writhing and dazed, with a shattered shoulder bone, lying where the sweep of that dried arm had dropped me.

I saw Gordon at short range fire four shots pointblank into the frightful form, and then it had grappled with him, and as I struggled futilely to regain my feet and re-enter the battle, my athletic friend, held helpless in those inhuman arms, was bent back across a table until it seemed his spine would give way.

It was Ganra Singh who saved us. The great Sikh came suddenly through the hangings like an Arctic blast and plunged into the fray like a wounded bull elephant. With a strength I have never seen equalled and which even the living-dead man could not resist, he tore the animated mummy from its prey and hurled it across the room. Borne on the crest of that irresistible onslaught, the mummy was flung backward until the great fireplace was at its back. Then with one last volcanic effort, the avenger crashed it headlong into the fire, beat it down, stamped it into the flames until they caught at the writhing limbs, and the frightful form crumbled and disintegrated among them with an intolerable scent of decayed and burning flesh.

Then Gordon, who had stood watching like a man in a dream, Gordon, the iron-nerved lion hunter who had braved a thousand perils, now crumpled forward on his face in a dead faint!

Later we talked the affair over, while Ganra Singh bandaged my hurts with hands as gentle and light of touch as those of a woman.

“I think,” I said weakly, “and I will admit that my view is untenable in the light of reason, but then any explanation must be incredible and improbable, that the people who made this mummy centuries and possibly thousands of years ago knew the art of preserving life; that by some means this man was

simply put to sleep and slept in a death-like manner all these years, just as Hindu fakirs appear to lie in death for days and weeks at a time. When the proper time came, then the creature awoke and started on its–or his–hideous course."

"What do you think, Ganra Singh?"

"Sahib," said the great Sikh courteously, "who am I to speak of hidden things? Many things are unknown to man. After the sahib had locked me into the room, I bethought me that whoever slew my master might escape while I stood helpless, and, desiring to go elsewhere, I plucked away the lock with as much silence as I could and went forth searching among the darkened rooms. At last I heard sounds in my own bedroom and, going there, found the sahibs fighting with the living-dead man. It was fortunate that before all this occurred I had built a great fire in my room so as to last all night, for I am unused to this cold country. I know that fire is the enemy of all evil things, the Great Cleanser, and so thrust the Evil One into the flame. I am glad to have avenged my master and aided the sahibs."

"Aided!" Gordon grinned. "If you hadn't showed up just when you did, our bally ships would have been sunk. Ganra Singh, I've already apologized for my suspicions; you're a real man."

"No, Slade," his face grew serious, "I think you are wrong. In the first place, the mummy isn't thousands of years old. It's scarcely ten years old! As I find by reading his secret notes, Sir Thomas didn't find it in a lost temple in Upper Egypt, he found it in a fetish hut in Central Africa. He couldn't explain its presence there, and so said he found it in the hinterlands of Egypt. He being an Egyptologist, it sounded better, too.

But he really thought it was very ancient, and, as we know, he was right about the unusual process of mummification. The tribesmen who sealed that mummy into its case knew more about such things than the ancient Egyptians, evidently. But it wouldn't have lasted over twenty years anyway, I'm sure. Then Sir Thomas came along and stole it from the tribesmen–the same tribe, by the way, who murdered Von Honmann.

“No, your theory is wrong, I feel. You have heard of the occult theory which states that a spirit, earthbound through hate or love, can only do material good or evil when animating a material body? The occultists say, reasonably enough, that to bridge the gulf which lies between the two worlds of life and death, the spirit or ghost must inhabit and animate a fleshly form–preferably its own former habitation.

This mummy had died as men die, but I believe that the hate it felt in life was sufficient to span the void of death, to cause the dead and withered body to move and act and do murder.

“Now, if this be true, there is no limit to the horror to which mankind may be heir. If this be true, men may be hovering forever on the brink of unthought oceans of supernatural terror, parted from the next world by a thin veil which may be rent, as we have just seen it rent. I would like to believe otherwise–but Slade–

“As Ganra Singh hurled the struggling mummy into the fire, I watched–the sunken features expanded in the heat for a fleeting instant, just as a toy balloon when inflated, and for one brief second took on a human and familiar likeness. *Slade, that face was the face of Gustave Von Honmann!* ”

The Dwellers Under the Tomb

I awoke suddenly and sat up in bed, sleepily wondering who it was that was battering on the door so violently; it threatened to shatter the panels. A voice squealed, sharpened intolerably as with mad terror.

“Conrad! Conrad!” someone outside the door was screaming. “For God’s sake, let me in! I’ve seen him!–I’ve seen him!”

“It sounds like Job Kiles,” said Conrad, lifting his long frame off the divan where he had been sleeping, after giving up his bed to me. “Don’t knock down the door!” he called, reaching for his slippers. “I’m coming.”

“Well, hurry!” squalled the unseen visitor. “I’ve just looked into the eyes of Hell!”

Conrad turned on a light and flung open the door, and in half fell, half staggered a wild-eyed shape which I recognized as the man Conrad had named–Job Kiles, a sour, miserly old man who lived on the small estate which adjoined that of Conrad. Now a grisly change had come over the man, usually so reticent and self-possessed. His sparse hair fairly bristled; drops of perspiration beaded his grey skin, and from time to time he shook as with a violent ague.

“What in God’s name is the matter, Kiles?” exclaimed Conrad, staring at him. “You look as if you’d seen a ghost!”

“A ghost!” Kiles’ high pitched voice cracked and dribbled off into a shriek of hysterical laughter. “I’ve seen a demon from Hell! I tell you, I saw him–tonight! Just a few minutes ago! He looked in at my window and laughed at me! Oh God, that laugh!”

“Who?” snapped Conrad impatiently.

“My brother Jonas!” screamed old Kiles.

Even Conrad started. Job’s twin brother Jonas had been dead for a week. Both Conrad and I had seen his corpse placed in the tomb high upon the steep slopes of Dagoth Hills. I remembered the hatred which had existed between the brothers–Job the miser, Jonas the spendthrift, dragging out his last days in poverty and loneliness, in the ruined old family mansion on the lower slopes of the Dagoth Hills, all the brooding venom in his embittered soul centering on the penurious brother who dwelt in a house of his own in the valley. This feeling had been reciprocated. Even when Jonas lay dying, Job had only grudgingly allowed himself to be persuaded to come to his brother. As it chanced, he had been alone with Jonas when the latter died, and the death scene must have been hideous, for Job had run out of the room, grey-faced and trembling, pursued by a horrible cackle of laughter, broken short by the sudden death-rattle.

Now old Job stood shaking before us, sweat pouring off his grey skin, and babbling his dead brother’s name.

“I saw him! I sat up later tonight than usual. Just as I turned out the light to go to bed–his face leered at me through the window, framed in the moonlight. He’s come back from Hell to drag me down, as he swore to do as he lay dying. He’s not human! He hadn’t been for years! I suspected it when he returned from his long wandering in the Orient. He’s a fiend in human shape! A vampire! He plans my destruction, body and soul!”

I sat speechless, utterly bewildered, and even Conrad found no words. Confronted by the apparent evidence of complete lunacy what is a man to say or do? My only thought was the obvious one that Job Kiles was insane. Now he seized Conrad by the breast of his dressing gown and shook him violently in the agony of his terror.

“There’s but one thing to do!” he cried, the light of desperation in his eyes. “I must go to his tomb! I must see with my own eyes if he still lies there where we laid him! And you must go with me! I dare not go through the darkness alone! He might be waiting for me–lying in wait behind any hedge or tree!”

“This is madness, Kiles,” expostulated Conrad. “Jonas is dead–you had a nightmare–”

“Nightmare!” his voice rose in a cracked scream. “I’ve had plenty since I stood beside his evil death-bed and heard the blasphemous threats pour like a black river from his foaming lips; but this was no dream! I was wide awake, and I tell you–I tell you I saw my demon-brother Jonas leering hideously through the window at me!”

He wrung his hands, moaning in terror, all pride, self-possession and poise swept away by stark, primitive, animal terror. Conrad glanced at me, but I had no suggestion to offer. The matter seemed so utterly insane that the only thing obvious seemed to summon the police and have old Job sent to the nearest madhouse. Yet there was in his manner a fundamental terror which seemed to strike even deeper than madness, and which, I will admit, caused a creepy sensation along my spine.

As if sensing our doubt, he broke out again, “I know! You think I’m crazy! I’m sane as you! But I’m going to that tomb, if I have to go alone! And if

you let me go alone, my blood will be on your heads!

Are you going?”

“Wait!” Conrad began to dress hurriedly. “We’ll go with you. I suppose the only thing that will destroy this hallucination is the sight of your brother in his coffin.”

“Aye!” old Job laughed terribly. “In his tomb, in the lidless coffin! Why did he prepare that open coffin before his death and leave orders that no lid of any sort be placed upon it?”

“He was always eccentric,” answered Conrad.

“He was always a devil,” snarled old Job. “We hated each other from our youth. When he squandered his inheritance and came crawling back, penniless, he resented it because I would not share my hard-gotten wealth with him. The black dog! The fiend from Purgatory’s pits!”

“Well, we’ll soon see if he’s safe in his tomb,” said Conrad. “Ready, O’Donnel?”

“Ready,” I answered, strapping on my holstered .45. Conrad laughed.

“Can’t forget your Texas raising, can you?” he bantered. “Think you might be called on to shoot a ghost?”

“Well, you can’t tell,” I answered. “I don’t like to go out at night without it.”

“Guns are useless against a vampire,” said Job, fidgeting with impatience. “There is only one thing which will prevail against them–a stake driven through the fiend’s black heart.”

“Great heavens, Job!” Conrad laughed shortly. “You can’t be serious about this thing?”

“Why not?” A flame of madness rose in his eyes. “There were vampires in days past–there still are in Eastern Europe and the Orient. I’ve heard *him*

boast about his knowledge of secret cults and black magic. I suspected it–then when he lay dying, he divulged his ghastly secret to me–swore he'd come back from the grave and drag me down to Hell with him!"

We emerged from the house and crossed the lawn. That part of the valley was sparsely settled, though a few miles to the southeast shone the lights of the city. Adjoining Conrad's grounds on the west lay Job's estate, the dark house looming gaunt and silent among the trees. That house was the one luxury the miserly old man allowed himself. A mile to the north flowed the river, and to the south rose the sullen black outlines of those low, rolling hills–barren-crowned, with long bush-clad slopes–which men call the Dagoth Hills–a curious name, not allied to any known Indian language, yet used first by the red man to designate this stunted range. They were practically uninhabited. There were farms on the outer slopes, toward the river, but the inner valleys were too shallow of soil, the hills themselves too rocky, for cultivation. Somewhat less than half a mile from Conrad's estate stood the rambling structure that had housed the Kiles family for some three centuries–at least, the stone foundations dated that far back, though the rest of the house was more modern. I thought old Job shuddered as he looked at it, perched there like a vulture on a roost, against the black undulating background of the Dagoth Hills.

It was a wild windy night through which we went on our mad quest. Clouds drove endlessly across the moon and the wind howled through the trees, bringing strange night noises and playing curious tricks with our voices. Our goal was the tomb which squatted on an upper slope of a hill which projected from the rest of the range, running behind and above the high tableland on which the old Kiles house stood. It was as if the occupant of the sepulcher looked out over the ancestral home and the valley his people had once owned from ridge to river. Now all the ground remaining to the old estate was the strip running up the slopes into the hills, the house at one end and the tomb at the other.

The hill upon which the tomb was built diverged from the others, as I have said, and in going to the tomb, we passed close by its steep, thicket-clad extremity, which fell off sharply in a rocky, bush-covered cliff.

We were nearing the point of this ridge when Conrad remarked, “What possessed Jonas to build his tomb so far from the family vaults?”

“He did not build it,” snarled Job. “It was built long ago by our ancestor, old Captain Jacob Kiles, for whom this particular projection is still called Pirate Hill–for he was a buccaneer and a smuggler. Some strange whim caused him to build his tomb up there, and in his lifetime he spent much time there alone, especially at night. But he never occupied it for he was lost at sea in a fight with a man-of-war. He used to watch for enemies or soldiers from that very bluff there ahead of us, and that’s why people call it Smuggler’s Point to this day.

“The tomb was in ruins when Jonas began living at the old house, and he had it repaired to receive his bones. Well he knew he dared not sleep in consecrated ground! Before he died he had made full arrangements–the tomb had been rebuilt, the lidless coffin placed in it to receive him–”

I shuddered in spite of myself. The darkness, the wild clouds scudding across the leprous moon, the shrieking wind-noises, the grim dark hills looming above us, the wild words of our companion, all worked upon my imagination to people the night with shapes of horror and nightmare. I glanced nervously at the thicket-masked slopes, black and repellent in the shifting light, and found myself wishing we were not passing so close to the bush-grown, legend-haunted cliffs of Smuggler’s Point, jutting out like the prow of a ship from the sinister range.

“I am no silly girl to be frightened by shadows,” old Job was chattering. “I saw his evil face at my moon-lit window. I have always secretly believed that the dead walk the night. Now–what’s that?”

He stopped short, frozen in an attitude of utter horror.

Instinctively we strained our ears. We heard the branches of the trees whipping in the gale. We heard the loud rustling of the tall grass.

“Only the wind,” muttered Conrad. “It distorts every sound–”

“No! No, I tell you! It was–”

A ghostly cry came driving down the wind–a voice sharpened with mortal fear and agony. “Help! Help!

Oh, God have mercy! Oh, God! Oh, God–”

“My brother’s voice!” screamed Job. “He is calling to me from Hell!”

“Which way did it come from?” whispered Conrad, with lips suddenly dry.

“I don’t know.” The goose-flesh stood out clammily on my limbs. “I couldn’t tell. It might have come from above–or below. It sounds strangely muffled.”

“The clutch of the grave muffles his voice!” shrieked Job. “The clinging shroud stifles his screams! I tell you he howls on the white-hot grids of Hell, and would drag me down to share his doom! On! On to the tomb!”

“The ultimate path of all mankind,” muttered Conrad, which grisly play on Job’s words did not add to my comfort. We followed old Kiles, scarcely able to keep pace with him as he loped, a gaunt, grotesque figure, across the slopes mounting towards the squat bulk the illusive moonlight disclosed like a dully glistening skull.

“Did you recognize that voice?” I muttered to Conrad.

“I don’t know. It was muffled, as you mentioned. It might have been a trick of the wind. If I said I thought it was Jonas, you’d think me mad.”

“Not now,” I muttered. “I thought it was insanity at the beginning. But the spirit of the night’s gotten into my blood. I’m ready to believe anything.”

We had mounted the slopes and stood before the massive iron door of the tomb. Above and behind it the hill rose steeply, masked by dense thickets. The grim mausoleum seemed invested with sinister portent, induced by the fantastic happenings of the night. Conrad turned the beam of an electric torch on the ponderous lock, with its antique appearance.

“This door has not been opened,” said Conrad. “The lock has not been tampered with. Look–spiders have already built their webs thickly across

the sill, and the strands are unbroken. The grass before the door has not been mashed down, as would have been the case had anyone recently gone into the tomb–or come out."

"What are doors and locks to a vampire?" whined Job. "They pass through solid walls like ghosts. I tell you, I will not rest until I have gone into that tomb and done what I have to do. I have the key–the only key there is in the world which will fit that lock."

He drew it forth–a huge old-fashioned implement–and thrust it into the lock. There was a groan and creak of rusty tumblers, and old Job winced back, as if expecting some hyena-fanged ghost to fly at him through the opening door.

Conrad and I peered in–and I will admit I involuntarily braced myself, shaken with chaotic conjectures.

But the blackness within was Stygian. Conrad made to snap on his light, but Job stopped him. The old man seemed to have recovered a good deal of his normal composure.

"Give me the light," he said, and there was grim determination in his voice. "I'll go in alone. If he has returned to the tomb–if he is again in his coffin, I know how to deal with him. Wait here, and if I cry out, or if you hear the sounds of a struggle, rush in."

"But–" Conrad began an objection.

"Don't argue!" shrieked old Kiles, his composure beginning to crumble again. "This is my task and I'll do it alone!"

He swore as Conrad inadvertently turned the light beam full in his face, then snatched the torch and drawing something from his coat, stalked into the tomb, shoving the ponderous door to behind him.

"More insanity," I muttered uneasily. "Why was he so insistent that we come with him, if he meant to go inside alone? And did you notice the gleam in his eyes? Sheer madness!"

“I’m not so sure,” answered Conrad. “It looked more like an evil triumph to me. As for being alone, you’d hardly call it that, since we’re only a few feet away from him. He has some reason for not wanting us to enter that tomb with him. What was it he drew from his coat as he went in?”

“It looked like a sharpened stick, and a small hammer. Why should he take a hammer, since there is no lid to be unfastened on the coffin?”

“Of course!” snapped Conrad. “What a fool I’ve been not to understand already! No wonder he wanted to go in to the tomb alone! O’Donnel, he’s serious about this vampire nonsense! Don’t you remember the hints he’s dropped about being prepared, and all that? He intends to drive that stake through his brother’s heart! Come on! I don’t intend that he shall mutilate–”

From the tomb rang a scream that will haunt me when I lie dying. The fearful timbre of it paralyzed us in our tracks, and before we could gather our wits, there was a mad rush of feet, the impact of a flying body against the door, and out of the tomb, like a bat blown out of the gates of Hell, flew the shape of Job Kiles. He fell head-long at our feet, the flashlight in his hand striking the ground and going out. Behind him the iron door stood ajar and I thought to hear a strange scrambling, sliding noise in the darkness. But all my attention was rivetted on the wretch who writhed at our feet in horrible convulsions.

We bent above him. The moon sliding from behind a dusky cloud lighted his ghastly face, and we both cried out involuntarily at the horror stamped there. From his distended eyes all light of sanity was gone–blown out as a candle is blown out in the dark. His loose lips worked, spattering forth. Conrad shook him. “Kiles! In God’s name, what happened to you?”

A horrible slavering mewling was the only answer; then among the drooling and meaningless sounds we caught human words, slobbering, and half inarticulate.

“The thing!–The thing in the coffin!” Then as Conrad cried a fierce question, the eyes rolled up and set, the hard-drawn lips froze in a ghastly mirthless grin, and the man’s whole lank frame seemed to sink and collapse upon itself.

“Dead!” muttered Conrad, appalled.

“I see no wound,” I whispered, shaken to my very soul.

“There is no wound–no drop of blood.”

“Then–then–” I scarcely dared put the grisly thought into words.

We looked fearsomely at the oblong strip of blackness framed in the partly open door of the silent tomb.

The wind shrieked suddenly across the grass, as if in a paean of demoniac triumph, and a sudden trembling took hold of me.

Conrad rose and squared his shoulders.

“Come on!” said he. “God knows what lurks in the hellish grave–but we’ve got to find out. The old man was overwrought–a prey to his own fears. His heart was none too strong. Anything might have caused his death. Are you with me?”

What terror of a tangible and understood menace can equal that of menace unseen and nameless? But I nodded consent, and Conrad picked up the flashlight, snapped it on, and grunted pleasure that it was not broken. Then we approached the tomb as men might approach the lair of a serpent. My gun was cocked in my hand as Conrad thrust open the door. His light played swiftly over the dank walls, dusty floor and vaulted roof, to come to rest on the lidless coffin which stood on its stone pedestal in the center. This we approached with drawn breath, not daring to conjecture what eldritch horror might meet our eyes. With a quick intake of breath, Conrad flashed his light into it. A cry escaped each of us; the coffin was empty.

“My God!” I whispered. “Job was right! But where is the–the vampire?”

“No empty coffin frightened the life out of Job Kiles’ body,” answered Conrad. “His last words were

‘the thing in the coffin.’ *Something* was in it–something the sight of which extinguished Job Kiles’ life like a blown-out candle.”

“But where is it?” I asked uneasily, a most ghastly thrill playing up and down my spine. “It could not have emerged from the tomb without our having seen it. Was it something that can make itself invisible at will?

Is it squatting unseen in the tomb with us here at this instant?”

“Such talk is madness,” snapped Conrad, but with a quick instinctive glance over his shoulder to right and left. Then he added, “Do you notice a faint repulsive odor about this coffin?”

“Yes, but I can’t define it.”

“Nor I. It isn’t exactly a charnel-house reek. It’s an earthy, reptilian sort of smell. It reminds me faintly of scents I’ve caught in mines far below the surface of the earth. It clings to the coffin–as if some unholy being out of the deep earth had lain there.”

He ran the light over the walls again, and halted it suddenly, focusing it on the back wall, which was cut out of the sheet rock of the hill on which the tomb was built.

“Look!”

In the supposedly solid wall showed a long thin aperture! With one stride Conrad reached it, and together we examined it. He pushed cautiously on the section of the wall nearest it, and it gave inward silently, opening on such blackness as I had not dreamed existed this side of the grave. We both involuntarily recoiled, and stood tensely, as if expecting some horror of the night to spring out at us. Then Conrad’s short laugh was like a dash of icy water on taut nerves.

“At least the occupant of the tomb uses an un-supernatural means of entrance and exit,” he said. “This secret door was constructed with extreme care, evidently. See, it is merely a large upright block of stone that turns on a pivot. And the silence with which it works shows that the pivot and sockets have been oiled recently.”

He directed his beam into the pit behind the door, and it disclosed a narrow tunnel running parallel to the door-sill, plainly cut into the solid rock of the hill. The sides and floor were smooth and even, the roof arched.

Conrad drew back, turning to me.

“O’Donnel, I seem to sense something dark and sinister indeed, here, and I feel sure it possesses a human agency. I feel as if we had stumbled upon a black, hidden river, running under our very feet.

Whither it leads, I can not say, but I believe the power behind it all is Jonas Kiles. I believe that old Job *did* see his brother at the window tonight.”

“But empty tomb or not, Conrad, Jonas Kiles is dead.”

“I think not. I believe he was in a self-induced state of catalepsy, such as is practiced by Hindu Fakirs. I have seen a few cases, and would have sworn they were really dead. They have discovered the secret of suspended animation at will, despite scientists and skeptics. Jonas Kiles lived several years in India, and he must have learned that secret, somehow.

“The open coffin, the tunnel leading from the tomb–all point to the belief that he was alive when he was placed here. For some reason he wished people to believe him to be dead. It may be the whim of a disordered mind. It may have a deeper and darker significance. In the light of his appearance to his brother and Job’s death, I lean to the latter view, but just now my suspicions are too horrible and fantastic to put into words. But I intend to explore this tunnel. Jonas may be hiding in it somewhere. Are you with me? Remember, the man may be a homicidal maniac, or if not, he may be more dangerous even than a madman.”

“I’m with you,” I grunted, though my flesh crawled at the prospect of plunging into that nighted pit. “But what about that scream we heard as we passed the Point? That was no feigning of agony! And what was the thing Job saw in the coffin?”

“I don’t know. It might have been Jonas, garbed in some hellish disguise. I’ll admit there is much mystery attached to this matter, even if we accept

the theory that Jonas is alive and behind it all. But we'll look into that tunnel. Help me lift Job. We can't leave him lying here like this. We'll put him in the coffin."

And so we lifted Job Kiles and laid him in the coffin of the brother he had hated, where he lay with his glassy eyes staring from his frozen grey features. As I looked at him, the dirge of the wind seemed to echo his words in my ears: "On! On to the tomb!" And his path had indeed led him to the tomb.

Conrad led the way through the secret door, which we left open. As we moved into that black tunnel I had a moment of sheer panic, and I was glad that the heavy outer door of the tomb was not furnished with a spring-lock, and that Conrad had in his pocket the only key with which the ponderous lock could be fastened. I had an uneasy feeling that the demoniac Jonas might make fast the door, leaving us sealed in the tomb until Judgment Day.

The tunnel seemed to run, roughly, east and west, following the outer line of the hill. We took the left-hand turn–toward the east–and moved along cautiously, shining the light ahead of us.

"This tunnel was never cut by Jonas Kiles," whispered Conrad. "It has a very air of antiquity about it–look!"

Another dark doorway appeared on our right. Conrad directed his beam through it, disclosing another, narrower passage. Other doorways opened into it on both sides.

"It's a regular network," I muttered. "Parallel corridors connected by smaller tunnels. Who'd have guessed such a thing lay under the Dagoth Hills?"

"How did Jonas Kiles discover it?" wondered Conrad. "Look, there's another doorway on our right–and another–and another! You're right–it's a veritable network of tunnels. Who in heaven's name dug them? They must be the work of some unknown prehistoric race. But this particular corridor has been used recently. See how the dust is disturbed on the floor? All the

doorways are on the right, none on the left. This corridor follows the outer line of the hill, and there must be an outlet somewhere along it.

Look!”

We were passing the opening of one of the dark intersecting tunnels, and Conrad had flashed his light on the wall beside it. There we saw a crude arrow marked in red chalk, pointed down the smaller corridor.

“That can’t lead to the outside,” I muttered. “It plunges deeper into the guts of the hill.”

“Let’s follow it, anyway,” answered Conrad. “We can find our way back to this outer tunnel easily.”

So down with it we went, crossing several other larger corridors, and at each finding the arrow, still pointing the way we were going. Conrad’s thin beam seemed almost lost in that dense blackness, and nameless forebodings and instinctive fears haunted me as we plunged deeper and deeper into the heart of that accursed hill. Suddenly the tunnel ended abruptly in a narrow stair that led down and vanished in the darkness. An involuntary shudder shook me as I looked down those carven steps. What unholy feet had padded them in forgotten ages? Then we saw something else–a small chamber opening onto the tunnel, just at the head of the stair. And as Conrad flashed his light into it, an involuntary exclamation burst from my lips. There was no occupant, but plenty of evidence of recent occupation. We entered and stood following the play of the thin finger of light.

That the chamber had been furnished for human occupancy was not so astonishing, in the light of our previous discoveries, but we stood aghast at the condition of the contents. A camp cot lay on its side, broken, the blankets strewn over the rocky floor in ragged strips. Books and magazines were torn to bits and scattered aimlessly about, cans of food lay carelessly about, battered and bent, some burst and the contents spilled. A lamp lay smashed on the floor.

“A hideout for somebody,” said Conrad. “And I’ll stake my head it’s Jonas Kiles. But what a chaos!

Look at those cans, apparently burst open by having been struck against the rock floor–and those blankets, torn in strips, as a man might rip a piece of paper. Good God, O'Donnel, no human being could work such havoc!"

"A madman might," I muttered. "What's that?"

Conrad had stopped and picked up a notebook. He held it up to his light.

"Badly torn," he grunted. "But here's luck, anyway. It's Jonas Kiles' diary! I know his handwriting.

Look, this last page is intact, and it's dated today! Positive proof that he's alive, were other proof lacking."

"But where is he?" I whispered, looking fearfully about. "And why all this devastation?"

"The only thing I can think of," said Conrad, "is that the man was at least partly sane when he entered these caverns, but has since become insane. We'd best be alert–if he is mad, it's altogether possible that he might attack us in the dark."

"I've thought of that," I growled with an involuntary shudder. "It's a pretty thought–a madman lurking in these hellish black tunnels to spring on our backs. Go ahead–read the diary while I keep an eye on the door."

"I'll read the last entry," said Conrad. "Perhaps it will throw some light on the subject."

And focussing the light on the cramped scrawl, he read: "All is now in readiness for my grand coup.

Tonight I leave this retreat forever, nor will I be sorry, for the eternal darkness and silence are beginning to shake even my iron nerves. I am becoming imaginative. Even as I write, I seem to hear stealthy sounds, as of things creeping up from below, although I have not seen so much as a bat or a snake in these tunnels. But tomorrow I will have taken up my abode in the fine house of my accursed brother.

While he–and it is a jest so rare I regret that I can not share it with someone–he will take my place in the cold darkness–darker and colder than even these dark tunnels.

“I must write, if I can not speak of it, for I am thrilled by my own cleverness. What diabolical cunning is mine! With what devilish craft have I plotted and prepared! Not the least was the way in which, before my ‘death’–ha! ha! ha! if the fools only knew–I worked on my brother’s superstitions–dropping hints and letting fall cryptic remarks. He always looked on me as a tool of the Evil One. Before my final ‘illness’ he trembled on the verge of belief that I had become supernatural or infernal. Then on my ‘death-bed’ when I poured my full fury upon him, his fright was genuine. I know that he is fully convinced that I am a vampire. Well do I know my brother. I am as certain as if I saw him, that he fled his home and prepared a stake to drive through my heart. But he will not make a move until he is sure that what he suspects is true.

“This assurance I will lend him. Tonight I will appear at his window. I will appear and vanish. I do not want to kill him with fright, because then my plans would be set at naught. I know that when he recovers from his first fright, he will come to my tomb to destroy me with his stake. And when he is safely in the tomb, I will kill him. I will change garments with him–lay him safely in the tomb, in the open coffin–and steal back to his fine house. We resemble each other enough, so that, with my knowledge of his ways and mannerisms, I can mimic him to perfection. Besides, who would ever suspect? It is too bizarre–too utterly fantastic. I will take up his life where he left off. People may wonder at the change in Job Kiles, but it will go no further than wondering. I will live and die in my brother’s shoes, and when the real death comes to me–may it be long deferred!–I will lie in state in the old Kiles vaults, with the name of Job Kiles on my headstone, while the real Job sleeps unguessed in the old tomb on Pirate Hill! Oh, it is a rare, rare jest!

“I wonder how old Jacob Kiles discovered these subterranean ways. He did not construct them. They were carved out of dim caverns and solid rock by the hands of forgotten men–how long ago I dare not venture a conjecture. While hiding here, waiting for the time to be ripe, I have amused myself by

exploring them. I have found that they are far more extensive than I had suspected. The hills must be honeycombed with them, and they sink into the earth to an incredible depth, tier below tier, like the stories of a building, each tier connected with the one below by a single stairway. Old Jacob Kiles must have used these tunnels, at least those of the upper tier, for the storing of plunder and contraband. He built the tomb to mask his real activities, and of course, cut the secret entrance and hung the door-stone on the pivot. He must have discovered the burrows by means of the hidden entrance at Smuggler's Point.

The old door he constructed there was a mere mass of rotting splinters and rusty metal when I found it.

As no one ever discovered it, after him, it is not likely anyone will find the new door I built with my own hands, to replace the old one. Still, I will take the proper precautions in due time.

"I have wondered much as to the identity of the race which must once have inhabited these labyrinths. I have found no bones or skulls, though I have discovered, in the upper tier, curiously hardened copper implements. On the next few stories I found stone implements, down to the tenth tier, where they disappeared. Also, on the topmost tier I found portions of walls decorated with paintings, greatly faded, but evidencing undoubted skill. These picture-paintings I found on all the tiers down to, and including, the fifth, though each tier's decorations were cruder than those of the one above, until the last paintings were mere meaningless daubs, such as an ape might make with a paintbrush. Also, the stone implements were much cruder on the lower levels, as was the workmanship of the roofs, stairs, doorways, etc. One gets a fantastic impression of an emprisoned race burrowing deeper and deeper into the black earth, century by century, and losing more and more of their human attributes as they sank to each new level.

"The fifteenth tier is without rhyme or reason, the tunnels running aimlessly, without apparent plan–so striking a contrast to the top-most tier, which is a triumph of primitive architecture, that it is difficult to believe them to have been constructed by the same race. Many centuries must have elapsed between the building of the two tiers, and the builders must have

become greatly degraded. But the fifteenth tier is not the end of these mysterious burrows.

“The doorway opening on the single stairway at the bottom of the lowest tier was blocked by stones which had fallen from the roof–probably hundreds of years ago, before old Captain Jacob discovered the tunnels. Prompted by curiosity, I cleared away the debris, in spite of the tax it was on my strength, and opened a hole in the heap this very day, although I did not have time to explore what lay beneath.

Indeed, I doubt if I could do so, for my light showed me, not the usual series of stone stairs, but a steep smooth shaft, leading down into the blackness. An ape or a serpent might pass up and down it, but not a human being. Into what unthinkable pits it leads, I do not care to even try to guess. For some reason, the realization that the fifteenth tier was not the ultimate boundary of the labyrinths was a shock. The sight of the unstepped shaft gave me a strangely creepy feeling, and led me to fantastic conjectures regarding the ultimate fate of the race which once lived in these hills. I had supposed the diggers, sinking lower and lower in the scale of life, had become extinct in the lower tiers, although I had not found any remains to justify my theories. The lower tiers do not lie in almost solid rock as do those nearer the surface. They are cut into black earth and a very soft sort of stone, and were apparently scooped out with the most primitive utensils; they even appear in places to have been dug out with fingers and nails. It might be the burrowings of animals, except for the evident attempt to imitate the more orderly systems above. But below the fifteenth tier, as I could see, even by my superficial investigations from above, all mimicry ceases; the diggings below the fifteenth tier are mad and brutish pits, and to what blasphemous depths they descend, I have no wish to know.

“I am haunted by fantastic speculations as to the identity of the race which literally sunk into the earth and disappeared in its black depths, so long ago. A legend persisted among Indians of this vicinity that many centuries before the coming of the white men, their ancestors drove a strange alien race into the caverns of Dagoth Hills, and sealed them up to perish. That they did not perish, but survived somehow for at least several centuries, is evident. Who they were, whence they came, what was their ultimate fate, will never be

known. Anthropologists might glean some evidence from the paintings on the upper tier, but I do not intend that anyone shall ever know about these burrows. Some of these dim pictures depict unmistakable Indians, at war with men evidently of the same race as the artists. These models, I should venture to say, resembled the Caucasian type rather than the Indian.

“But the time approaches for my call on my beloved brother. I will go forth by the door in Smuggler’s Point, and return the same way. I will reach the tomb before my brother, however quickly he comes–as come I know he will. Then when the deed is done, I will go forth from the tomb, and no man shall ever set foot in these corridors again. For I shall see that the tomb is never opened, and a convenient dynamite-blast shall shake down enough rocks from the cliffs above to effectually seal the door in Smuggler’s Point forever.”

Conrad slipped the notebook into his pocket.

“Mad or sane,” he said grimly, “Jonas Kiles is a proper devil. I am not greatly surprised, but I am slightly shocked. What a hellish plot! But he erred in one thing: he apparently took it for granted that Job would come to the tomb alone. The fact that he did not was sufficient to upset his calculations.”

“Ultimately,” I answered. “Yet inasfar as Job is concerned, Jonas has succeeded in his fiendish plan–he managed to kill his brother somehow. Evidently he was in the tomb when Job entered. He frightened him to death somehow, then, evidently realizing our presence, slipped away through the secret door.”

Conrad shook his head. A growing nervousness had made itself evident in his manner as he had progressed with the reading of the diary. From time to time he had paused and lifted his head in a listening attitude.

“O’Donnel, I do not believe that it was Jonas that Job saw in the coffin. I have changed my opinion somewhat. An evil human mind was first at the back of all this, but some of the aspects of this business I can not attribute to humanity.

“That cry we heard at the Point–the condition of this room–the absence of Jonas–all indicate something even darker and more sinister than Jonas Kiles’ murder plot.”

“What do you mean?” I asked uneasily.

“Suppose that the race which dug these tunnels *did not perish!* ” he whispered. “Suppose their descendants still dwell in some state of abnormal existence in the black pits below the tiers of corridors!

Jonas mentions in his notes that he thought to hear stealthy sounds, as of things creeping up from *below!* ”

“But he lived in these tunnels for a week,” I expostulated.

“You forget that the shaft leading to the pits was blocked up until today, when he cleared away the rocks. O’Donnel, I believe that the lower pits *are* inhabited, that the creatures have found their way up into these tunnels, and that it was the sight of one of them, sleeping in the coffin, which killed Job Kiles!”

“But this is utter madness!” I exclaimed.

“Yet these tunnels were inhabited in times past, and according to what we have read, the inhabitants must have sunk to an incredibly low level of life. What proof have we that their descendants have not lived on in the horrible black pits which Jonas saw below the lower tier? Listen!”

He had snapped off his light, and we had been standing in the darkness for some minutes. Somewhere I heard a faint sliding, scrambling noise. Stealthily we stole into the tunnel.

“It is Jonas Kiles!” I whispered, but an icy sensation stole up and down my spine.

“Then he has been hiding below,” muttered Conrad. “The sounds come from the stairs–as of something creeping up from below. I dare not flash the light–if he is armed it might draw his fire.”

I wondered why Conrad, iron-nerved in the presence of human enemies, should be trembling like a leaf. I wondered why cold trickles of nameless horror should trace their way along my spine. And then I was electrified. Somewhat back up the tunnel, in the direction from which we had come, I heard another soft repellent sound. And at that instant Conrad's fingers sunk like steel into my arm. In the murky darkness below us, two yellow oblique sparks suddenly glittered.

"My God!" came Conrad's shocked whisper. *"That's not Jonas Kiles!"*

As he spoke another pair joined the first–then suddenly the dark well below us was alive with floating yellow gleams, like evil stars reflected in a nighted gulf. They flowed up the stairs toward us, silently except for that detestable sliding sound. A vile earthy smell welled up to our nostrils.

"Back, in God's name!" gasped Conrad, and we began to move back away from the stairs, up the tunnel down which we had come. Then suddenly there came the rush of some heavy body through the air, and wheeling, I fired blindly and pointblank in the darkness. And my scream, as the flash momentarily lighted the shadow, was echoed by Conrad. The next instant we were racing up the tunnel as men might run from hell, while behind us something flopped and floundered and wallowed on the floor in its death-throes.

"Turn on your light," I gasped. "We mustn't get lost in these hellish labyrinths."

The beam stabbed the dark ahead of us, and showed us the outer corridor where we had first seen the arrow. There we halted an instant, and Conrad directed his beam back down the tunnel. We saw only the empty darkness, but beyond that short ray of light, God only knows what horrors crawled through the blackness.

"My God, my God!" Conrad panted. "Did you see? Did you see?"

"I don't know!" I gasped. "I glimpsed something–like a flying shadow–in the flash of the shot. It wasn't a man–it had a head something like a dog–"

“I wasn’t looking in that direction,” he whispered. “I was looking down the stairs when the flash of your gun cut the darkness.”

“What did you see?” My flesh was clammy with cold sweat.

“Human words can not describe it!” he cried. “The black earth quickened as with giant maggots. The darkness heaving and writhing with blasphemous life. In God’s name, let’s get out of here–down this corridor to the tomb!”

But even as we took a forward step, we were paralyzed by stealthy sounds ahead of us.

“The corridors are alive with them!” whispered Conrad. “Quick–the other way! This corridor follows the line of the hill and must run to the door in Smuggler’s Point.”

Until I die I will remember that flight down that black silent corridor, with the horror that slunk at our heels. I momentarily expected some demon-fanged spectre to leap upon our backs, or rise up out of the blackness ahead of us. Then Conrad, shining his dimming light ahead, gave a gasping sob of relief.

“The door at last! My God, what’s this?”

Even as his light had shown a heavy iron-bound door, with a heavy key in the massive lock, he had stumbled over something that lay crumpled on the floor. His light showed a twisted human shape, its blasted head lying in a pool of blood. The features were unrecognizable, but we knew the gaunt, lank shape, still clad in the grave-clothes. The real Death had overtaken Jonas Kiles at last.

“That cry as we passed the Point tonight!” whispered Conrad. “It was his death-scream! He had returned to the tunnels after showing himself to his brother–and horror came upon him in the dark!”

Suddenly, as we stood above the corpse, we heard again that damnable sliding scrambling noise in the darkness. In a frenzy we leaped at the door–tore at the key–hurled open the door. With a sob of relief we staggered into

the moon-lit night. For an instant the door swung open behind us, then as we turned to look, a savage gust of wind crashed it shut.

But before it closed, a ghastly picture leaped out at us, half lighted by the straggling moon-beams: the sprawling, mutilated corpse, and above it a grey, shambling monstrosity–a flaming-eyed dog-headed horror such as madmen see in black nightmares. Then the slamming door blotted out the sight, and as we fled across the slope in the shifting moon-light, I heard Conrad babbling, “Spawn of the black pits of madness and eternal night! Crawling obscenities seething in the slime of the earth’s unguessed deeps–the ultimate horror of retrogression–the nadir of human degeneration–good God, their ancestors were men!

The pits below the fifteenth tier, into what hells of blasphemous black horror do they sink, and by what demoniac hordes are they peopled? God protect the sons of men from the Dwellers–the Dwellers under the tomb!”

An Open Window

Behind the Veil what gulfs of Time and Space?

What blinking mowing Shapes to blast the sight?

I shrink before a vague colossal Face

Born in the mad immensities of Night.

The House of Arabu

To the house whence no one issues,

To the road from whence there is no return,

To the house whose inhabitants are deprived of light,

The place where dust is their nourishment, their food clay,

They have no light, dwelling in dense darkness,

And they are clothed, like birds, in a garment of feathers,

Where, over gate and bolt, dust is scattered.

–Babylonian legend of Ishtar

“Has he seen a night-spirit, is he listening to the whispers of them who dwell in darkness?”

Strange words to be murmured in the feast-hall of Naram-ninub, amid the strain of lutes, the patter of fountains, and the tinkle of women’s laughter. The great hall attested the wealth of its owner, not only by its vast dimensions, but by the richness of its adornment. The glazed surface of the walls offered a bewildering variegation of colors–blue, red, and orange enamels set off by squares of hammered gold.

The air was heavy with incense, mingled with the fragrance of exotic blossoms from the gardens without.

The feasters, silk-robed nobles of Nippur, lounged on satin cushions, drinking wine poured from alabaster vessels, and caressing the painted and bejeweled playthings which Naram-ninub’s wealth had brought from all parts of the East.

There were scores of these; their white limbs twinkled as they danced, or shone like ivory among the cushions where they sprawled. A jeweled tiara caught in a burnished mass of night-black hair, a gem-crusted armlet of massive gold, earrings of carven jade–these were their only garments. Their fragrance was dizzying. Shameless in their dancing, feasting and lovemaking, their light laughter filled the hall in waves of silvery sound.

On a broad cushion-piled dais reclined the giver of the feast, sensuously stroking the glossy locks of a lithe Arabian who had stretched herself on her supple belly beside him. His appearance of sybaritic languor was belied by the vital sparkling of his dark eyes as he surveyed his guests. He was thick-bodied, with a short blue-black beard: a Semite–one of the many drifting yearly into Shumir.

With one exception his guests were Shumirians, shaven of chin and head. Their bodies were padded with rich living, their features smooth and placid. The exception among them stood out in startling contrast.

Taller than they, he had none of their soft sleekness. He was made with the economy of relentless Nature. His physique was of the primitive, not of the civilized athlete. He was an incarnation of Power, raw, hard, wolfish–in the sinewy limbs, the corded neck, the great arch of the breast, the broad hard shoulders. Beneath his tousled golden mane his eyes were like blue ice. His strongly chiselled features reflected the wildness his frame suggested. There was about him nothing of the measured leisure of the other guests, but a ruthless directness in his every action. Whereas they sipped, he drank in great gulps.

They nibbled at tid-bits, but he seized whole joints in his fingers and tore at the meat with his teeth. Yet his brow was shadowed, his expression moody. His magnetic eyes were introspective. Wherefore Prince Ibi-Engur lisped again in Naram-ninub's ear: "Has the lord Pyrrhas heard the whispering of night-things?"

Naram-ninub eyed his friend in some worriment. "Come, my lord," said he, "you are strangely distraught.

Has any here done aught to offend you?"

Pyrrhas roused himself as from some gloomy meditation and shook his head. "Not so, friend; if I seem distracted it is because of a shadow that lies over my own mind." His accent was barbarous, but the timbre of his voice was strong and vibrant.

The others glanced at him in interest. He was Eannatum's general of mercenaries, an Argive whose saga was epic.

"Is it a woman, lord Pyrrhas?" asked Prince Enakalli with a laugh. Pyrrhas fixed him with his gloomy stare and the prince felt a cold wind blowing on his spine.

“Aye, a woman,” muttered the Argive. “One who haunts my dreams and floats like a shadow between me and the moon. In my dreams I feel her teeth in my neck, and I wake to hear the flutter of wings and the cry of an owl.”

A silence fell over the group on the dais. Only in the great hall below rose the babble of mirth and conversation and the tinkling of lutes, and a girl laughed loudly, with a curious note in her laughter.

“A curse is upon him,” whispered the Arabian girl. Naram-ninub silenced her with a gesture, and was about to speak, when Ibi-Engur lisped: “My lord Pyrrhas, this has an uncanny touch, like the vengeance of a god. Have you done aught to offend a deity?”

Naram-ninub bit his lip in annoyance. It was well known that in his recent campaign against Erech, the Argive had cut down a priest of Anu in his shrine. Pyrrhas’ maned head jerked up and he glared at Ibi-Engur as if undecided whether to attribute the remark to malice or lack of tact. The prince began to pale, but the slim Arabian rose to her knees and caught at Naram-ninub’s arm.

“Look at Belibna!” She pointed at the girl who had laughed so wildly an instant before.

Her companions were drawing away from this girl apprehensively. She did not speak to them, or seem to see them. She tossed her jeweled head and her shrill laughter rang through the feast-hall. Her slim body swayed back and forth, her bracelets clanged and jangled together as she tossed up her white arms. Her dark eyes gleamed with a wild light, her red lips curled with her unnatural mirth.

“The hand of Arabu is on her,” whispered the Arabian uneasily.

“Belibna!” Naram-ninub called sharply. His only answer was another burst of wild laughter, and the girl cried stridently: “To the home of darkness, the dwelling of Irhalla; to the road whence there is no return; oh, Apsu, bitter is thy wine!” Her voice snapped in a terrible scream, and bounding from among her cushions, she leaped up on the dais, a dagger in her hand.

Courtesans and guests shrieked and scrambled madly out of her way. But it was at Pyrrhas the girl rushed, her beautiful face a mask of fury. The Argive caught her wrist, and the abnormal strength of madness was futile against the barbarian's iron thews. He tossed her from him, and down the cushion-strewn steps, where she lay in a crumpled heap, her own dagger driven into her heart as she fell.

The hum of conversation, which had ceased suddenly, rose again as the guards dragged away the body, and the painted dancers came back to their cushions. But Pyrrhas turned and taking his wide crimson cloak from a slave, threw it about his shoulders.

"Stay, my friend," urged Naram-ninub. "Let us not allow this small matter to interfere with our revels.

Madness is common enough."

Pyrrhas shook his head irritably. "Nay, I'm weary of swilling and gorging. I'll go to my own house."

"Then the feasting is at an end," declared the Semite, rising and clapping his hands. "My own litter shall bear you to the house the king has given you–nay, I forgot you scorn to ride on other men's backs. Then I shall myself escort you home. My lords, will you accompany us?"

"Walk, like common men?" stuttered Prince Ur-ilishu. "By Enlil, I will come. It will be a rare novelty. But I must have a slave to bear the train of my robe, lest it trail in the dust of the street. Come, friends, let us see the lord Pyrrhas home, by Ishtar!"

"A strange man," Ibi-Engur lisped to Libit-ishbi, as the party emerged from the spacious palace, and descended the broad tiled stair, guarded by bronze lions. "He walks the streets, unattended, like a very tradesman."

"Be careful," murmured the other. "He is quick to anger, and he stands high in the favor of Eannatum."

“Yet even the favored of the king had best beware of offending the god Anu,” replied Ibi-Engur in an equally guarded voice.

The party were proceeding leisurely down the broad white street, gaped at by the common folk who bobbed their shaven heads as they passed. The sun was not long up, but the people of Nippur were well astir. There was much coming and going between the booths where the merchants spread their wares: a shifting panorama, woven of craftsmen, tradesmen, slaves, harlots, and soldiers in copper helmets. There went a merchant from his warehouse, a staid figure in sober woolen robe and white mantle; there hurried a slave in a linen tunic; there minced a painted hoyden whose short slit skirt displayed her sleek flank at every step. Above them the blue of the sky whitened with the heat of the mounting sun. The glazed surfaces of the buildings shimmered. They were flat-roofed, some of them three or four stories high.

Nippur was a city of sun-dried brick, but its facings of enamel made it a riot of bright color.

Somewhere a priest was chanting: “Oh, Babbar, righteousness lifteth up to thee its head–”

Pyrrhas swore under his breath. They were passing the great temple of Enlil, towering up three hundred feet in the changeless blue sky.

“The towers stand against the sky like part of it,” he swore, raking back a damp lock from his forehead.

“The sky is enameled, and this is a world made by man.”

“Nay, friend,” demurred Naram-ninub. “Ea built the world from the body of Tiamat.”

“I say men built Shumir!” exclaimed Pyrrhas, the wine he had drunk shadowing his eyes. “A flat land–a very banquet-board of a land–with rivers and cities painted upon it, and a sky of blue enamel over it. By Ymir, I was born in a land the gods built! There are great blue mountains, with valleys lying like long shadows between, and snow peaks glittering in the sun.

Rivers rush foaming down the cliffs in everlasting tumult, and the broad leaves of the trees shake in the strong winds."

"I, too, was born in a broad land, Pyrrhas," answered the Semite. "By night the desert lies white and awful beneath the moon, and by day it stretches in brown infinity beneath the sun. But it is in the swarming cities of men, these hives of bronze and gold and enamel and humanity, that wealth and glory lie."

Pyrrhas was about to speak, when a loud wailing attracted his attention. Down the street came a procession, bearing a carven and painted litter on which lay a figure hidden by flowers. Behind came a train of young women, their scanty garments rent, their black hair flowing wildly. They beat their naked bosoms and cried: "*Ailanu!* Thammuz is dead!" The throng in the street took up the shout. The litter passed, swaying on the shoulders of the bearers; among the high-piled flowers shone the painted eyes of a carven image. The cry of the worshippers echoed down the street, dwindling in the distance.

Pyrrhas shrugged his mighty shoulders. "Soon they will be leaping and dancing and shouting, 'Adonis is living!', and the wenches who howl so bitterly now will give themselves to men in the streets for exultation. How many gods are there, in the devil's name?"

Naram-ninub pointed to the great zikkurat of Enlil, brooding over all like the brutish dream of a mad god.

"See ye the seven tiers: the lower black, the next of red enamel, the third blue, the fourth orange, the fifth yellow, while the sixth is faced with silver, and the seventh with pure gold which flames in the sunlight?

Each stage in the temple symbolizes a deity: the sun, the moon, and the five planets Enlil and his tribe have set in the skies for their emblems. But Enlil is greater than all, and Nippur is his favored city."

"Greater than Anu?" muttered Pyrrhas, remembering a flaming shrine and a dying priest that gasped an awful threat.

“Which is the greatest leg of a tripod?” parried Naram-ninub.

Pyrrhas opened his mouth to reply, then recoiled with a curse, his sword flashing out. Under his very feet a serpent reared up, its forked tongue flickering like a jet of red lightning.

“What is it, friend?” Naram-ninub and the princes stared at him in surprise.

“What is it?” He swore. “Don’t you see that snake under your very feet? Stand aside and give me a clean swing at it–”

His voice broke off and his eyes clouded with doubt.

“It’s gone,” he muttered.

“I saw nothing,” said Naram-ninub, and the others shook their heads, exchanging wondering glances.

The Argive passed his hand across his eyes, shaking his head.

“Perhaps it’s the wine,” he muttered. “Yet there was an adder, I swear by the heart of Ymir. I am accursed.”

The others drew away from him, glancing at him strangely.

There had always been a restlessness in the soul of Pyrrhas the Argive, to haunt his dreams and drive him out on his long wanderings. It had brought him from the blue mountains of his race, southward into the fertile valleys and sea-fringing plains where rose the huts of the Mycenaeans; thence into the isle of Crete, where, in a rude town of rough stone and wood, a swart fishing people bartered with the ships of Egypt; by those ships he had gone into Egypt, where men toiled beneath the lash to rear the first pyramids, and where, in the ranks of the white-skinned mercenaries, the Shardana, he learned the arts of war. But his wanderlust drove him again across the sea, to a mud-walled trading village on the coast of Asia, called Troy, whence he drifted southward into the pillage and carnage of Palestine where the original dwellers in the land were trampled under by the barbaric Canaanites out of the East. So by devious ways he came at last to the plains

of Shumir, where city fought city, and the priests of a myriad rival gods intrigued and plotted, as they had done since the dawn of Time, and as they did for centuries after, until the rise of an obscure frontier town called Babylon exalted its city-god Merodach above all others as Bel-Marduk, the conqueror of Tiamat.

The bare outline of the saga of Pyrrhas the Argive is weak and paltry; it can not catch the echoes of the thundering pageantry that rioted through that saga: the feasts, revels, wars, the crash and splintering of ships and the onset of chariots. Let it suffice to say that the honor of kings was given to the Argive, and that in all Mesopotamia there was no man so feared as this golden-haired barbarian whose war-skill and fury broke the hosts of Erech on the field, and the yoke of Erech from the neck of Nippur.

From a mountain hut to a palace of jade and ivory Pyrrhas' saga had led him. Yet the dim half-animal dreams that had filled his slumber when he lay as a youth on a heap of wolfskins in his shaggy-headed father's hut were nothing so strange and monstrous as the dreams that haunted him on the silken couch in the palace of turquoise-towered Nippur.

It was from these dreams that Pyrrhas woke suddenly. No lamp burned in his chamber and the moon was not yet up, but the starlight filtered dimly through the casement. And in this radiance something moved and took form. There was the vague outline of a lithe form, the gleam of an eye. Suddenly the night beat down oppressively hot and still. Pyrrhas heard the pound of his own blood through his veins.

Why fear a woman lurking in his chamber? But no woman's form was ever so pantherishly supple; no woman's eyes ever burned so in the darkness. With a gasping snarl he leaped from his couch and his sword hissed as it cut the air–but only the air. Something like a mocking laugh reached his ears, but the figure was gone.

A girl entered hastily with a lamp.

"Amytis! I saw *her*! It was no dream, this time! She laughed at me from the window!"

Amytis trembled as she set the lamp on an ebony table. She was a sleek sensuous creature, with long-lashed, heavy-lidded eyes, passionate lips, and a wealth of lustrous black curly locks. As she stood there naked the voluptuousness of her figure would have stirred the most jaded debauchee. A gift from Eannatum, she hated Pyrrhas, and he knew it, but found an angry gratification in possessing her. But now her hatred was drowned in her terror.

“It was Lilitu!” she stammered. “She has marked you for her own! She is the night-spirit, the mate of Ardat Lili. They dwell in the House of Arabu. You are accursed!”

His hands were bathed with sweat; molten ice seemed to be flowing sluggishly through his veins instead of blood.

“Where shall I turn? The priests hate and fear me since I burned Anu’s temple.”

“There is a man who is not bound by the priest-craft, and could aid you,” she blurted out.

“Then tell me!” He was galvanized, trembling with eager impatience. “His name, girl! His name!”

But at this sign of weakness, her malice returned; she had blurted out what was in her mind, in her fear of the supernatural. Now all the vindictiveness in her was awake again.

“I have forgotten,” she answered insolently, her eyes glowing with spite.

“Slut!” Gasping with the violence of his rage, he dragged her across a couch by her thick locks. Seizing his sword-belt he wielded it with savage force, holding down the writhing naked body with his free hand.

Each stroke was like the impact of a drover’s whip. So mazed with fury was he, and she so incoherent with pain, that he did not at first realize that she was shrieking a name at the top of her voice. Recognizing this at last, he cast her from him, to fall in a whimpering heap on the mat-covered floor.

Trembling and panting from the excess of his passion, he threw aside the belt and glared down at her.

“Gimil-ishbi, eh?’’

OceanofPDF.com

“Yes!” she sobbed, grovelling on the floor in her excruciating anguish. “He was a priest of Enlil, until he turned diabolist and was banished. Ahhh, I faint! I swoon! Mercy! Mercy!”

“And where shall I find him?” he demanded.

“In the mound of Enzu, to the west of the city. Oh, Enlil, I am flayed alive! I perish!”

Turning from her, Pyrrhas hastily donned his garments and armor, without calling for a slave to aid him.

He went forth, passed among his sleeping servitors without waking them, and secured the best of his horses. There were perhaps a score in all in Nippur, the property of the king and his wealthier nobles; they had been bought from the wild tribes far to the north, beyond the Caspian, whom in a later age men called Scythians. Each steed represented an actual fortune. Pyrrhas bridled the great beast and strapped on the saddle–merely a cloth pad, ornamented and richly worked.

The soldiers at the gate gaped at him as he drew rein and ordered them to open the great bronze portals, but they bowed and obeyed without question. His crimson cloak flowed behind him as he galloped through the gate.

“Enlil!” swore a soldier. “The Argive has drunk overmuch of Naram-ninub’s Egyptian wine.”

“Nay,” responded another; “did you see his face that it was pale, and his hand that it shook on the rein?

The gods have touched him, and perchance he rides to the House of Arabu.”

Shaking their helmeted heads dubiously, they listened to the hoof-beats dwindling away in the west.

North, south and east from Nippur, farm-huts, villages and palm groves clustered the plain, threaded by the networks of canals that connected the rivers. But westward the land lay bare and silent to the Euphrates, only

charred expanses telling of former villages. A few moons ago raiders had swept out of the desert in a wave that engulfed the vineyards and huts and burst against the staggering walls of Nippur.

Pyrrhas remembered the fighting along the walls, and the fighting on the plain, when his sally at the head of his phalanxes had broken the besiegers and driven them in headlong flight back across the Great River.

Then the plain had been red with blood and black with smoke. Now it was already veiled in green again as the grain put forth its shoots, uncared for by man. But the toilers who had planted that grain had gone into the land of dusk and darkness.

Already the overflow from more populous districts was seeping back into the man-made waste. A few months, a year at most, and the land would again present the typical aspect of the Mesopotamian plain, swarming with villages, checkered with tiny fields that were more like gardens than farms. Man would cover the scars man had made, and there would be forgetfulness, till the raiders swept again out of the desert. But now the plain lay bare and silent, the canals choked, broken and empty.

Here and there rose the remnants of palm groves, the crumbling ruins of villas and country palaces.

Further out, barely visible under the stars, rose the mysterious hillock known as the mound of Enzu–the moon. It was not a natural hill, but whose hands had reared it and for what reason none knew. Before Nippur was built it had risen above the plain, and the nameless fingers that shaped it had vanished in the dust of time. To it Pyrrhas turned his horse’s head.

And in the city he had left, Amytis furtively left his palace and took a devious course to a certain secret destination. She walked rather stiffly, limped, and frequently paused to tenderly caress her person and lament over her injuries. But limping, cursing, and weeping, she eventually reached her destination, and stood before a man whose wealth and power was great in Nippur. His glance was an interrogation.

“He has gone to the Mound of the Moon, to speak with Gimil-ishbi,” she said.

“Lilitu came to him again tonight,” she shuddered, momentarily forgetting her pain and anger. “Truly he is accursed.”

“By the priests of Anu?” His eyes narrowed to slits.

“So he suspects.”

“And you?”

“What of me? I neither know nor care.”

“Have you ever wondered why I pay you to spy upon him?” he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. “You pay me well; that is enough for me.”

“Why does he go to Gimil-ishbi?”

“I told him the renegade might aid him against Lilitu.”

Sudden anger made the man’s face darkly sinister.

“I thought you hated him.”

She shrank from the menace in the voice. “I spoke of the diabolist before I thought, and then he forced me to speak his name; curse him, I will not sit with ease for weeks!” Her resentment rendered her momentarily speechless.

The man ignored her, intent on his own somber meditations. At last he rose with sudden determination.

“I have waited too long,” he muttered, like one speaking his thoughts aloud. “The fiends play with him while I bite my nails, and those who conspire with me grow restless and suspicious. Enlil alone knows what counsel Gimil-ishbi will give. When the moon rises I will ride forth and seek the Argive on the plain.

A stab unaware–he will not suspect until my sword is through him. A bronze blade is surer than the powers of Darkness. I was a fool to trust even a devil."

Amytis gasped with horror and caught at the velvet hangings for support.

"You? *You?* " Her lips framed a question too terrible to voice.

"Aye!" He accorded her a glance of grim amusement. With a gasp of terror she darted through the curtained door, her smarts forgotten in her fright.

Whether the cavern was hollowed by man or by Nature, none ever knew. At least its walls, floor and ceiling were symmetrical and composed of blocks of greenish stone, found nowhere else in that level land. Whatever its cause and origin, man occupied it now. A lamp hung from the rock roof, casting a weird light over the chamber and the bald pate of the man who sat crouching over a parchment scroll on a stone table before him. He looked up as a quick sure footfall sounded on the stone steps that led down into his abode. The next instant a tall figure stood framed in the doorway.

The man at the stone table scanned this figure with avid interest. Pyrrhas wore a hauberk of black leather and copper scales; his brazen greaves glinted in the lamplight. The wide crimson cloak, flung loosely about him, did not enmesh the long hilt that jutted from its folds. Shadowed by his horned bronze helmet, the Argive's eyes gleamed icily. So the warrior faced the sage.

Gimil-ishbi was very old. There was no leaven of Semitic blood in his withered veins. His bald head was round as a vulture's skull, and from it his great nose jutted like the beak of a vulture. His eyes were oblique, a rarity even in a pure-blooded Shumirian, and they were bright and black as beads. Whereas Pyrrhas' eyes were all depth, blue deeps and changing clouds and shadows, Gimil-ishbi's eyes were opaque as jet, and they never changed. His mouth was a gash whose smile was more terrible than its snarl.

He was clad in a simple black tunic, and his feet, in their cloth sandals, seemed strangely deformed.

Pyrrhas felt a curious twitching between his shoulder-blades as he glanced at those feet, and he drew his eyes away, and back to the sinister face.

“Deign to enter my humble abode, warrior,” the voice was soft and silky, sounding strange from those harsh thin lips. “I would I could offer you food and drink, but I fear the food I eat and the wine I drink would find little favor in your sight.” He laughed softly as at an obscure jest.

“I come not to eat or to drink,” answered Pyrrhas abruptly, striding up to the table. “I come to buy a charm against devils.”

“To buy?”

The Argive emptied a pouch of gold coins on the stone surface; they glistened dully in the lamplight.

Gimil-ishbi’s laugh was like the rustle of a serpent through dead grass.

“What is this yellow dirt to me? You speak of devils, and you bring me dust the wind blows away.”

“Dust?” Pyrrhas scowled. Gimil-ishbi laid his hand on the shining heap and laughed; somewhere in the night an owl moaned. The priest lifted his hand. Beneath it lay a pile of yellow dust that gleamed dully in the lamplight. A sudden wind rushed down the steps, making the lamp flicker, whirling up the golden heap; for an instant the air was dazzled and spangled with the shining particles. Pyrrhas swore; his armor was sprinkled with yellow dust; it sparkled among the scales of his hauberk.

“Dust that the wind blows away,” mumbled the priest. “Sit down, Pyrrhas of Nippur, and let us converse with each other.”

Pyrrhas glanced about the narrow chamber; at the even stacks of clay tablets along the walls, and the rolls of papyrus above them. Then he seated himself on the stone bench opposite the priest, hitching his sword-belt so that his hilt was well to the front.

“You are far from the cradle of your race,” said Gimil-ishbi. “You are the first golden-haired rover to tread the plains of Shumir.”

“I have wandered in many lands,” muttered the Argive, “but may the vultures pluck my bones if I ever saw a race so devil-ridden as this, or a land ruled and harried by so many gods and demons.”

His gaze was fixed in fascination on Gimil-ishbi’s hands; they were long, narrow, white and strong, the hands of youth. Their contrast to the priest’s appearance of great age otherwise, was vaguely disquieting.

“To each city its gods and their priests,” answered Gimil-ishbi; “and all fools. Of what account are gods whom the fortunes of men lift or lower? Behind all gods of men, behind the primal trinity of Ea, Anu and Enlil, lurk the elder gods, unchanged by the wars or ambitions of men. Men deny what they do not see.

The priests of Eridu, which is sacred to Ea and light, are no blinder than them of Nippur, which is consecrated to Enlil, whom they deem the lord of Darkness. But he is only the god of the darkness of which men dream, not the real Darkness that lurks behind all dreams, and veils the real and awful deities.

I glimpsed this truth when I was a priest of Enlil, wherefore they cast me forth. Ha! They would stare if they knew how many of their worshippers creep forth to me by night, as you have crept.”

“I creep to no man!” the Argive bristled instantly. “I came to buy a charm. Name your price, and be damned to you.”

“Be not wroth,” smiled the priest. “Tell me why you have come.”

“If you are so cursed wise you should know already,” growled the Argive, unmollified. Then his gaze clouded as he cast back over his tangled trail. “Some magician has cursed me,” he muttered. “As I rode back from my triumph over Erech, my war-horse screamed and shied at Something none saw but he.

Then my dreams grew strange and monstrous. In the darkness of my chamber, wings rustled and feet padded stealthily. Yesterday a woman at a feast went mad and tried to knife me. Later an adder sprang out of empty air and struck at me. Then, this night, she men call Lilitu came to my chamber and mocked me with awful laughter–"

"Lilitu?" the priest's eyes lit with a brooding fire; his skull-face worked in a ghastly smile. "Verily, warrior, they plot thy ruin in the House of Arabu. Your sword can not prevail against her, or against her mate Ardat Lili. In the gloom of midnight her teeth will find your throat. Her laugh will blast your ears, and her burning kisses will wither you like a dead leaf blowing in the hot winds of the desert. Madness and dissolution will be your lot, and you will descend to the House of Arabu whence none returns."

Pyrrhas moved restlessly, cursing incoherently beneath his breath.

"What can I offer you besides gold?" he growled.

"Much!" the black eyes shone; the mouth-gash twisted in inexplicable glee. "But I must name my own price, after I have given you aid."

Pyrrhas acquiesced with an impatient gesture.

"Who are the wisest men in the world?" asked the sage abruptly.

"The priests of Egypt, who scrawled on yonder parchments," answered the Argive.

Gimil-ishbi shook his head; his shadow fell on the wall like that of a great vulture, crouching over a dying victim.

"None so wise as the priests of Tiamat, who fools believe died long ago under the sword of Ea. Tiamat is deathless; she reigns in the shadows; she spreads her dark wings over her worshippers."

"I know them not," muttered Pyrrhas uneasily.

"The cities of men know them not; but the wasteplaces know them, the reedy marshes, the stony deserts, the hills, and the caverns. To them steal

the winged ones from the House of Arabu."

"I thought none came from that House," said the Argive.

"No *human* returns thence. But the servants of Tiamat come and go at their pleasure."

Pyrrhas was silent, reflecting on the place of the dead, as believed in by the Shumirians; a vast cavern, dusty, dark and silent, through which wandered the souls of the dead forever, shorn of all human attributes, cheerless and loveless, remembering their former lives only to hate all living men, their deeds and dreams.

"I will aid you," murmured the priest. Pyrrhas lifted his helmeted head and stared at him. Gimil-ishbi's eyes were no more human than the reflection of firelight on subterranean pools of inky blackness. His lips sucked in as if he gloated over all woes and miseries of mankind. Pyrrhas hated him as a man hates the unseen serpent in the darkness.

"Aid me and name your price," said the Argive.

Gimil-ishbi closed his hands and opened them, and in the palms lay a gold cask, the lid of which fastened with a jeweled catch. He sprung the lid, and Pyrrhas saw the cask was filled with grey dust. He shuddered without knowing why.

"This ground dust was once the skull of the first king of Ur," said Gimil-ishbi. "When he died, as even a necromancer must, he concealed his body with all his art. But I found his crumbling bones, and in the darkness above them, I fought with his soul as a man fights with a python in the night. My spoil was his skull, that held darker secrets than those that lie in the pits of Egypt.

"With this dead dust shall you trap Lilitu. Go quickly to an enclosed place–a cavern or a chamber–nay, that ruined villa which lies between this spot and the city will serve. Strew the dust in thin lines across threshold and window; leave not a spot as large as a man's hand unguarded. Then lie down as if in slumber. When Lilitu enters, as she will, speak the words I

shall teach you. Then you are her master, until you free her again by repeating the conjure backwards. You can not slay her, but you can make her swear to leave you in peace. Make her swear by the dugs of Tiamat. Now lean close and I will whisper the words of the spell."

Somewhere in the night a nameless bird cried out harshly; the sound was more human than the whispering of the priest, which was no louder than the gliding of an adder through slimy ooze. He drew back, his gash-mouth twisted in a grisly smile. The Argive sat for an instant like a statue of bronze. Their shadows fell together on the wall with the appearance of a crouching vulture facing a strange horned monster.

Pyrrhas took the cask and rose, wrapping his crimson cloak about his somber figure, his homed helmet lending an illusion of abnormal height.

"And the price?"

Gimil-ishbi's hands became claws, quivering with lust.

"Blood! A life!"

"Whose life?"

"Any life! So blood flows, and there is fear and agony, a spirit ruptured from its quivering flesh! I have one price for all–a human life! Death is my rapture; I would glut my soul on death! Man, maid, or infant.

You have sworn. Make good your oath! A life! A human life!"

"Aye, a life!" Pyrrhas' sword cut the air in a flaming arc and Gimil-ishbi's vulture head fell on the stone table. The body reared upright, spouting black blood, then slumped across the stone. The head rolled across the surface and thudded dully on the floor. The features stared up, frozen in a mask of awful surprise.

Outside there sounded a frightful scream as Pyrrhas' stallion broke its halter and raced madly away across the plain.

From the dim chamber with its tablets of cryptic cuneiforms and papyri of dark hieroglyphics, and from the remnants of the mysterious priest, Pyrrhas fled. As he climbed the carven stair and emerged into the starlight he doubted his own reason.

Far across the level plain the moon was rising, dull red, darkly lurid. Tense heat and silence held the land.

Pyrrhas felt cold sweat thickly beading his flesh; his blood was a sluggish current of ice in his veins; his tongue clove to his palate. His armor weighted him and his cloak was like a clinging snare. Cursing incoherently he tore it from him; sweating and shaking he ripped off his armor, piece by piece, and cast it away. In the grip of his abysmal fears he had reverted to the primitive. The veneer of civilization vanished.

Naked but for loin-cloth and girded sword he strode across the plain, carrying the golden cask under his arm.

No sound disturbed the waiting silence as he came to the ruined villa whose walls reared drunkenly among heaps of rubble. One chamber stood above the general ruin, left practically untouched by some whim of chance. Only the door had been wrenched from its bronze hinges. Pyrrhas entered. Moonlight followed him in and made a dim radiance inside the portal. There were three windows, gold-barred.

Sparingly he crossed the threshold with a thin grey line. Each casement he served in like manner. Then tossing aside the empty cask, he stretched himself on a bare dais that stood in deep shadow. His unreasoning horror was under control. He who had been the hunted was now the hunter. The trap was set, and he waited for his prey with the patience of the primitive.

He had not long to wait. Something threshed the air outside and the shadow of great wings crossed the moon-lit portal. There was an instant of tense silence in which Pyrrhas heard the thunderous impact of his own heart against his ribs. Then a shadowy form framed itself in the open door. A fleeting instant it was visible, then it vanished from view. The thing had entered; the night-fiend was in the chamber.

Pyrrhas' hand clenched on his sword as he heaved up suddenly from the dais. His voice crashed in the stillness as he thundered the dark enigmatic conjurement whispered to him by the dead priest. He was answered by a frightful scream; there was a quick stamp of bare feet, then a heavy fall, and something was threshing and writhing in the shadows on the floor. As Pyrrhas cursed the masking darkness, the moon thrust a crimson rim above a casement, like a goblin peering into a window, and a molten flood of light crossed the floor. In the pale glow the Argive saw his victim.

But it was no were-woman that writhed there. It was a thing like a man, lithe, naked, dusky-skinned. It differed not in the attributes of humanity except for the disquieting suppleness of its limbs, the changeless glitter of its eyes. It grovelled as in mortal agony, foaming at the mouth and contorting its body into impossible positions.

With a blood-mad yell Pyrrhas ran at the figure and plunged his sword through the squirming body. The point rang on the tiled floor beneath it, and an awful howl burst from the frothing lips, but that was the only apparent effect of the thrust. The Argive wrenched forth his sword and glared astoundedly to see no stain on the steel, no wound on the dusky body. He wheeled as the cry of the captive was re-echoed from without.

Just outside the enchanted threshold stood a woman, naked, supple, dusky, with wide eyes blazing in a soulless face. The being on the floor ceased to writhe, and Pyrrhas' blood turned to ice.

"Lilitu!"

She quivered at the threshold, as if held by an invisible boundary. Her eyes were eloquent with hate; they yearned awfully for his blood and his life. She spoke, and the effect of a human voice issuing from that beautiful unhuman mouth was more terrifying than if a wild beast had spoken in human tongue.

"You have trapped my mate! You dare to torture Ardat Lili, before whom the gods tremble! Oh, you shall howl for this! You shall be torn bone from bone, and muscle from muscle, and vein from vein!

Loose him! Speak the words and set him free, lest even this doom be denied you!”

“Words!” he answered with bitter savagery. “You have hunted me like a hound. Now you can not cross that line without falling into my hands as your mate has fallen. Come into the chamber, bitch of darkness, and let me caress you as I caress your lover–thus!–and thus!–and thus!”

Ardat Lili foamed and howled at the bite of the keen steel, and Lilitu screamed madly in protest, beating with her hands as at an invisible barrier.

“Cease! Cease! Oh, could I but come at you! How I would leave you a blind, mangled cripple! Have done! Ask what you will, and I will perform it!”

“That is well,” grunted the Argive grimly. “I can not take this creature’s life, but it seems I can hurt him, and unless you give me satisfaction, I will give him more pain than ever he guesses exists in the world.”

“Ask! Ask!” urged the were-woman, twisting with impatience.

“Why have you haunted me? What have I done to earn your hate?”

“Hate?” she tossed her head. “What are the sons of men that we of Shuala should hate or love? When the doom is loosed, it strikes blindly.”

“Then who, or what, loosed the doom of Lilitu upon me?”

“One who dwells in the House of Arabu.”

“Why, in Ymir’s name?” swore Pyrrhas. “Why should the dead hate me?” He halted, remembering a priest who died gurgling curses.

“The dead strike at the bidding of the living. Someone who moves in the sunlight spoke in the night to one who dwells in Shuala.”

“Who?”

“I do not know.”

“You lie, you slut! It is the priests of Anu, and you would shield them. For that lie your lover shall howl to the kiss of the steel–”

“Butcher!” shrieked Lilitu. “Hold your hand! I swear by the dugs of Tiamat my mistress, I do not know what you ask. What are the priests of Anu that I should shield them? I would rip up all their bellies–as I would yours, could I come at you! Free my mate, and I will lead you to the House of Darkness itself, and you may wrest the truth from the awful mouth of the dweller himself, if you dare!”

“I will go,” said Pyrrhas, “but I leave Ardat Lili here as hostage. If you deal falsely with me, he will writhe on this enchanted floor throughout all eternity.”

Lilitu wept with fury, crying: “No devil in Shuala is crueller than you. Haste, in the name of Apsu!”

Sheathing his sword, Pyrrhas stepped across the threshold. She caught his wrist with fingers like velvet-padded steel, crying something in a strange inhuman tongue. Instantly the moon-lit sky and plain were blotted out in a rush of icy blackness. There was a sensation of hurtling through a void of intolerable coldness, a roaring in the Argive’s ears as of titan winds. Then his feet struck solid ground; stability followed that chaotic instant, that had been like the instant of dissolution that joins or separates two states of being, alike in stability, but in kind more alien than day and night. Pyrrhas knew that in that instant he had crossed an unimaginable gulf, and that he stood on shores never before touched by living human feet.

Lilitu’s fingers grasped his wrist, but he could not see her. He stood in darkness of a quality which he had never encountered. It was almost tangibly soft, all-pervading and all-engulfing. Standing amidst it, it was not easy even to imagine sunlight and bright rivers and grass singing in the wind. They belonged to that other world–a world lost and forgotten in the dust of a million centuries. The world of life and light was a whim of chance–a bright spark glowing momentarily in a universe of dust and shadows. Darkness and silence were the natural state of the cosmos, not light and the noises of Life. No wonder the dead hated the living, who disturbed the grey stillness of Infinity with their tinkling laughter.

Lilitu’s fingers drew him through abysmal blackness. He had a vague sensation as of being in a titanic cavern, too huge for conception. He sensed walls and roof, though he did not see them and never reached them; they seemed to recede as he advanced, yet there was always the sensation of their presence. Sometimes his feet stirred what he hoped was only dust. There was a dusty scent throughout the darkness; he smelled the odors of decay and mould.

He saw lights moving like glow-worms through the dark. Yet they were not lights, as he knew radiance.

They were more like spots of lesser gloom, that seemed to glow only by contrast with the engulfing blackness which they emphasized without illuminating. Slowly, laboriously they crawled through the eternal night. One approached the companions closely and Pyrrhas’ hair stood up and he grasped his sword. But Lilitu took no heed as she hurried him on. The dim spot glowed close to him for an instant; it vaguely illumined a shadowy countenance, faintly human, yet strangely birdlike.

Existence became a dim and tangled thing to Pyrrhas, wherein he seemed to journey for a thousand years through the blackness of dust and decay, drawn and guided by the hand of the were-woman. Then he heard her breath hiss through her teeth, and she came to a halt.

Before them shimmered another of those strange globes of light. Pyrrhas could not tell whether it illumined a man or a bird. The creature stood upright like a man, but it was clad in grey feathers–at least they were more like feathers than anything else. The features were no more human than they were birdlike.

“This is the dweller in Shuala which put upon you the curse of the dead,” whispered Lilitu. “Ask him the name of him who hates you on earth.”

“Tell me the name of mine enemy!” demanded Pyrrhas, shuddering at the sound of his own voice, which whispered drearily and uncannily through the unechoing darkness.

The eyes of the dead burned redly and it came at him with a rustle of pinions, a long gleam of light springing into its lifted hand. Pyrrhas recoiled, clutching at his sword, but Lilitu hissed: “Nay, use this!”

and he felt a hilt thrust into his fingers. He was grasping a scimitar with a blade curved in the shape of the crescent moon, that shone like an arc of white fire.

He parried the bird-thing’s stroke, and sparks showered in the gloom, burning him like bits of flame. The darkness clung to him like a black cloak; the glow of the feathered monster bewildered and baffled him.

It was like fighting a shadow in the maze of a nightmare. Only by the fiery gleam of his enemy’s blade did he keep the touch of it. Thrice it sang death in his ears as he deflected it by the merest fraction, then his own crescent-edge cut the darkness and grated on the other’s shoulder-joint. With a strident screech the thing dropped its weapon and slumped down, a milky liquid spurting from the gaping wound. Pyrrhas lifted his scimitar again, when the creature gasped in a voice that was no more human than the grating of wind-blown boughs against one another: “Naram-ninub, the great-grandson of my great-grandson! By black arts he spoke and commanded me across the gulfs!”

“Naram-ninub!” Pyrrhas stood frozen in amazement; the scimitar was torn from his hand. Again Lilitu’s fingers locked on his wrist Again the dark was drowned in deep blackness and howling winds blowing between the spheres.

He staggered in the moonlight without the ruined villa, reeling with the dizziness of his transmutation.

Beside him Lilitu’s teeth shone between her curling red lips. Catching the thick locks clustered on her neck, he shook her savagely, as he would have shaken a mortal woman.

“Harlot of Hell! What madness has your sorcery instilled in my brain?”

“No madness!” she laughed, striking his hand aside. “You have journeyed to the House of Arabu, and you have returned. You have spoken with, and overcome with the sword of Apsu, the shade of a man dead for long centuries.

“Then it was no dream of madness! But Naram-ninub–” he halted in confused thought. “Why, of all the men of Nippur, he has been my staunchest friend!”

“Friend?” she mocked. “What is friendship but a pleasant pretense to while away an idle hour?”

“But why, in Ymir’s name?”

“What are the petty intrigues of men to me?” she exclaimed angrily. “Yet now I remember that men from Erech, wrapped in cloaks, steal by night to Naram-ninub’s palace.”

“Ymir!” Like a sudden blaze of light Pyrrhas saw reason in merciless clarity. “He would sell Nippur to Erech, and first he must put me out of the way, because the hosts of Nippur cannot stand before me! Oh, dog, let my knife find your heart!”

“Keep faith with me!” Lilitu’s importunities drowned his fury. “I have kept faith with you. I have led you where never living man has trod, and brought you forth unharmed. I have betrayed the dwellers in darkness and done that for which Tiamat will bind me naked on a whitehot grid for seven times seven days. Speak the words and free Ardat Lili!”

Still engrossed in Naram-ninub’s treachery, Pyrrhas spoke the incantation. With a loud sigh of relief, the were-man rose from the tiled floor and came into the moonlight. The Argive stood with his hand on his sword and his head bent, lost in moody thought. Lilitu’s eyes flashed a quick meaning to her mate. Lithely they began to steal toward the abstracted man. Some primitive instinct brought his head up with a jerk.

They were closing in on him, their eyes burning in the moonlight, their fingers reaching for him. Instantly he realized his mistake; he had forgotten

to make them swear truce with him; no oath bound them from his flesh.

With feline screeches they struck in, but quicker yet he bounded aside and raced toward the distant city.

Too hotly eager for his blood to resort to sorcery, they gave chase. Fear winged his feet, but close behind him he heard the swift patter of their feet, their eager panting. A sudden drum of hoofs sounded in front of him, and bursting through a tattered grove of skeleton palms, he almost caromed against a rider, who rode like the wind, a long silvery glitter in his hand. With a startled oath the horseman wrenched his steed back on its haunches. Pyrrhas saw looming over him a powerful body in scale-mail, a pair of blazing eyes that glared at him from under a domed helmet, a short black beard.

“You dog!” he yelled furiously. “Damn you, have you come to complete with your sword what your black magic began?”

The steed reared wildly as he leaped at its head and caught its bridle. Cursing madly and fighting for balance, Naram-ninub slashed at his attacker’s head, but Pyrrhas parried the stroke and thrust upward murderously. The sword-point glanced from the corselet and plowed along the Semite’s jaw-bone.

Naram-ninub screamed and fell from the plunging steed, spouting blood. His leg-bone snapped as he pitched heavily to earth, and his cry was echoed by a gloating howl from the shadowed grove.

Without dragging the rearing horse to earth, Pyrrhas sprang to its back and wrenched it about.

Naram-ninub was groaning and writhing on the ground, and as Pyrrhas looked, two shadows darted from the darkened grove and fastened themselves on his prostrate form. A terrible scream burst from his lips, echoed by more awful laughter. Blood on the night air; on it the night-things would feed, wild as mad dogs, marking no difference between men.

The Argive wheeled away, toward the city, then hesitated, shaken by a fierce revulsion. The level land lay quiescent beneath the moon, and the brutish pyramid of Enlil stood up in the stars. Behind him lay his enemy, glutting the fangs of the horrors he himself had called up from the Pits. The road was open to Nippur, for his return.

His return?–to a devil-ridden people crawling beneath the heels of priest and king; to a city rotten with intrigue and obscene mysteries; to an alien race that mistrusted him, and a mistress that hated him.

Wheeling his horse again, he rode westward toward the open lands, flinging his arms wide in a gesture of renunciation and the exultation of freedom. The weariness of life dropped from him like a cloak. His mane floated in the wind, and over the plains of Shumir shouted a sound they had never heard before–the gusty, elemental, reasonless laughter of a free barbarian.

The Man on the Ground

Cal Reynolds shifted his tobacco quid to the other side of his mouth as he squinted down the dull blue barrel of his Winchester. His jaws worked methodically, their movement ceasing as he found his bead.

He froze into rigid immobility; then his finger hooked on the trigger. The crack of the shot sent the echoes rattling among the hills, and like a louder echo came an answering shot. Reynolds flinched down, flattening his rangy body against the earth, swearing softly. A gray flake jumped from one of the rocks near his head, the ricocheting bullet whining off into space. Reynolds involuntarily shivered. The sound was as deadly as the singing of an unseen rattler.

He raised himself gingerly high enough to peer out between the rocks in front of him. Separated from his refuge by a broad level grown with mesquite-grass and prickly-pear, rose a tangle of boulders similar to that behind which he crouched. From among these boulders floated a thin wisp of whitish smoke.

Reynold’s keen eyes, trained to sun-scorched distances, detected a small circle of dully gleaming blue steel among the rocks. That ring was the

muzzle of a rifle, but Reynolds well knew who lay behind that muzzle.

The feud between Cal Reynolds and Esau Brill had been long, for a Texas feud. Up in the Kentucky mountains family wars may straggle on for generations, but the geographical conditions and human temperament of the Southwest were not conducive to long-drawn-out hostilities. There feuds were generally concluded with appalling suddenness and finality. The stage was a saloon, the streets of a little cow-town, or the open range. Sniping from the laurel was exchanged for the close-range thundering of six-shooters and sawed-off shotguns which decided matters quickly, one way or the other.

The case of Cal Reynolds and Esau Brill was somewhat out of the ordinary. In the first place, the feud concerned only themselves. Neither friends nor relatives were drawn into it. No one, including the participants, knew just how it started. Cal Reynolds merely knew that he had hated Esau Brill most of his life, and that Brill reciprocated. Once as youths they had clashed with the violence and intensity of rival young catamounts. From that encounter Reynolds carried away a knife scar across the edge of his ribs, and Brill a permanently impaired eye. It had decided nothing. They had fought to a bloody gasping deadlock, and neither had felt any desire to “shake hands and make up.” That is a hypocrisy developed in civilization, where men have no stomach for fighting to the death. After a man has felt his adversary’s knife grate against his bones, his adversary’s thumb gouging at his eyes, his adversary’s boot-heels stamped into his mouth, he is scarcely inclined to forgive and forget, regardless of the original merits of the argument.

So Reynolds and Brill carried their mutual hatred into manhood, and as cowpunchers riding for rival ranches, it followed that they found opportunities to carry on their private war. Reynolds rustled cattle from Brill’s boss, and Brill returned the compliment. Each raged at the other’s tactics, and considered himself justified in eliminating his enemy in any way that he could. Brill caught Reynolds without his gun one night in a saloon at Cow Wells, and only an ignominious flight out the back way, with bullets barking at his heels, saved the Reynolds scalp.

Again Reynolds, lying in the chaparral, neatly knocked his enemy out of his saddle at five hundred yards with a .30-.30 slug, and, but for the inopportune appearance of a line-rider, the feud would have ended there, Reynolds deciding, in the face of this witness, to forego his original intention of leaving his covert and hammering out the wounded man's brains with his rifle butt.

Brill recovered from his wound, having the vitality of a longhorn bull, in common with all his sun-leathered iron-thewed breed, and as soon as he was on his feet, he came gunning for the man who had waylaid him.

Now after these onsets and skirmishes, the enemies faced each other at good rifle range, among the lonely hills where interruption was unlikely.

For more than an hour they had lain among the rocks, shooting at each hint of movement. Neither had scored a hit, though the .30-.30's whistled perilously close.

In each of Reynolds' temples a tiny pulse hammered maddeningly. The sun beat down on him and his shirt was soaked with sweat. Gnats swarmed about his head, getting into his eyes, and he cursed venomously. His wet hair was plastered to his scalp; his eyes burned with the glare of the sun, and the rifle barrel was hot to his calloused hand. His right leg was growing numb and he shifted it cautiously, cursing at the jingle of the spur, though he knew Brill could not hear. All this discomfort added fuel to the fire of his wrath. Without process of conscious reasoning, he attributed all his suffering to his enemy. The sun beat dazingly on his sombrero, and his thoughts were slightly addled. It was hotter than the hearthstone of hell among those bare rocks. His dry tongue caressed his baked lips.

Through the muddle of his brain burned his hatred of Esau Brill. It had become more than an emotion: it was an obsession, a monstrous incubus. When he flinched from the whip-crack of Brill's rifle, it was not from fear of death, but because the thought of dying at the hands of his foe was an intolerable horror that made his brain rock with red frenzy. He would have thrown his life away recklessly, if by so doing he could have sent Brill into eternity just three seconds ahead of himself.

He did not analyze these feelings. Men who live by their hands have little time for self-analysis. He was no more aware of the quality of his hate for Esau Brill than he was consciously aware of his hands and feet. It was part of him, and more than part: it enveloped him, engulfed him; his mind and body were no more than its material manifestations. He was the hate; it was the whole soul and spirit of him.

Unhampered by the stagnant and enervating shackles of sophistication and intellectuality, his instincts rose sheer from the naked primitive. And from them crystallized an almost tangible abstraction—a hate too strong for even death to destroy; a hate powerful enough to embody itself in itself, without the aid or the necessity of material substance.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour neither rifle had spoken. Instinct with death as rattlesnakes coiled among the rocks soaking up poison from the sun's rays, the feudists lay each waiting his chance, playing the game of endurance until the taut nerves of one or the other should snap.

It was Esau Brill who broke. Not that his collapse took the form of any wild madness or nervous explosion. The wary instincts of the wild were too strong in him for that. But suddenly, with a screamed curse, he hitched up on his elbow and fired blindly at the tangle of stones which concealed his enemy.

Only the upper part of his arm and the corner of his blue-shirted shoulder were for an instant visible. That was enough. In that flash-second Cal Reynolds jerked the trigger, and a frightful yell told him his bullet had found its mark. And at the animal pain in that yell, reason and life-long instincts were swept away by an insane flood of terrible joy. He did not whoop exultantly and spring to his feet; but his teeth bared in a wolfish grin and he involuntarily raised his head. Waking instinct jerked him down again. It was chance that undid him. Even as he ducked back, Brill's answering shot cracked.

Cal Reynolds did not hear it, because, simultaneously with the sound, something exploded in his skull, plunging him into utter blackness, shot briefly with red sparks.

The blackness was only momentary. Cal Reynolds glared wildly around, realizing with a frenzied shock that he was lying in the open. The impact of the shot had sent him rolling from among the rocks, and in that quick instant he realized that it had not been a direct hit. Chance had sent the bullet glancing from a stone, apparently to flick his scalp in passing. That was not so important. What was important was that he was lying out in full view, where Esau Brill could fill him full of lead. A wild glance showed his rifle lying close by. It had fallen across a stone and lay with the stock against the ground, the barrel slanting upward. Another glance showed his enemy standing upright among the stones that had concealed him.

In that one glance Cal Reynolds took in the details of the tall, rangy figure: the stained trousers sagging with the weight of the holstered six-shooter, the legs tucked into the worn leather boots; the streak of crimson on the shoulder of the blue shirt, which was plastered to the wearer's body with sweat; the tousled black hair, from which perspiration was pouring down the unshaven face. He caught the glint of yellow tobacco-stained teeth shining in a savage grin. Smoke still drifted from the rifle in Brill's hands.

These familiar and hated details stood out in startling clarity during the fleeting instant while Reynolds struggled madly against the unseen chains which seemed to hold him to the earth. Even as he thought of the paralysis a glancing blow on the head might induce, something seemed to snap and he rolled free.

Rolled is hardly the word: he seemed almost to dart to the rifle that lay across the rock, so light his limbs felt.

Dropping behind the stone he seized the weapon. He did not even have to lift it. As it lay it bore directly on the man who was now approaching.

His hand was momentarily halted by Esau Brill's strange behavior. Instead of firing or leaping back into cover the man came straight on, his rifle in the crook of his arm, that damnable leer still on his unshaven lips. Was he mad? Could he not see that his enemy was up again, raging with life, and with a cocked rifle at his heart? Brill seemed not to be looking at him, but to one side, at the spot where Reynolds had just been lying.

Without seeking further for the explanation of his foe's actions, Cal Reynolds pulled the trigger. With the vicious spang of the report a blue shred leaped from Brill's broad breast. He staggered back, his mouth flying open. And the look on his face froze Reynolds again. Esau Brill came of a breed which fights to its last gasp. Nothing was more certain than that he would go down pulling the trigger blindly until the last red vestige of life left him. Yet the ferocious triumph was wiped from his face with the crack of the shot, to be replaced by an awful expression of dazed surprize. He made no move to lift his rifle, which slipped from his grasp, nor did he clutch at his wound. Throwing out his hands in a strange, stunned, helpless way, he reeled backward on slowly buckling legs, his features frozen into a mask of stupid amazement that made his watcher shiver with its cosmic horror.

Through the opened lips gushed a tide of blood, dyeing the damp shirt. And like a tree that sways and rushes suddenly earthward, Esau Brill crashed down among the mesquite-grass and lay motionless.

Cal Reynolds rose, leaving the rifle where it lay. The rolling grass-grown hills swam misty and indistinct to his gaze. Even the sky and the blazing sun had a hazy unreal aspect. But a savage content was in his soul.

The long feud was over at last, and whether he had taken his death-wound or not, he had sent Esau Brill to blaze the trail to hell ahead of him.

Then he started violently as his gaze wandered to the spot where he had rolled after being hit. He glared; were his eyes playing him tricks? Yonder in the grass Esau Brill lay dead—yet only a few feet away stretched another body.

Rigid with surprize, Reynolds glared at the rangy figure, slumped grotesquely beside the rocks. It lay partly on its side, as if flung there by some blind convulsion, the arms outstretched, the fingers crooked as if blindly clutching. The short-cropped sandy hair was splashed with blood, and from a ghastly hole in the temple the brains were oozing. From a corner of the mouth seeped a thin trickle of tobacco juice to stain the dusty neck-cloth.

And as he gazed, an awful familiarity made itself evident. He knew the feel of those shiny leather wrist-bands; he knew with fearful certainty whose hands had buckled that gun-belt; the tang of that tobacco juice was still on his palate.

In one brief destroying instant he knew he was looking down at his own lifeless body. And with the knowledge came true oblivion.

Old Garfield's Heart

I was sitting on the porch when my grandfather hobbled out and sank down on his favorite chair with the cushioned seat, and began to stuff tobacco in his old corncob-pipe.

"I thought you'd be goin' to the dance," he said.

"I'm waiting for Doc Blaine," I answered. "I'm going over to old man Garfield's with him."

My grandfather sucked at his pipe awhile before he spoke again.

"Old Jim purty bad off?"

"Doc says he hasn't a chance."

"Who's takin' care of him?"

"Joe Braxton–against Garfield's wishes. But somebody had to stay with him."

My grandfather sucked his pipe noisily, and watched the heat lightning playing away off up in the hills; then he said: "You think old Jim's the biggest liar in this county, don't you?"

"He tells some pretty tall tales," I admitted. "Some of the things he claimed he took part in, must have happened before he was born."

"I came from Tennesee to Texas in 1870," my grandfather said abruptly. "I saw this town of Lost Knob grow up from nothin'. There wasn't even a log-

hut store here when I came. But old Jim Garfield was here, livin' in the same place he lives now, only then it was a log cabin. He don't look a day older now than he did the first time I saw him."

"You never mentioned that before," I said in some surprize.

"I knew you'd put it down to an old man's maunderin's," he answered. "Old Jim was the first white man to settle in this country. He built his cabin a good fifty miles west of the frontier. God knows how he done it, for these hills swarmed with Comanches then.

"I remember the first time I ever saw him. Even then everybody called him 'old Jim.'

"I remember him tellin' me the same tales he's told you–how he was at the battle of San Jacinto when he was a youngster, and how he'd rode with Ewen Cameron and Jack Hayes. Only I believe him, and you don't."

"That was so long ago–" I protested.

"The last Indian raid through this country was in 1874," said my grandfather, engrossed in his own reminiscences. "I was in on that fight, and so was old Jim. I saw him knock old Yellow Tail off his mustang at seven hundred yards with a buffalo rifle.

"But before that I was with him in a fight up near the head of Locust Creek. A band of Comanches came down Mesquital, lootin' and burnin', rode through the hills and started back up Locust Creek, and a scout of us were hot on their heels. We ran on to them just at sundown in a mesquite flat. We killed seven of them, and the rest skinned out through the brush on foot. But three of our boys were killed, and Jim Garfield got a thrust in the breast with a lance.

"It was an awful wound. He lay like a dead man, and it seemed sure nobody could live after a wound like that. But an old Indian came out of the brush, and when we aimed our guns at him, he made the peace sign and spoke to us in Spanish. I don't know why the boys didn't shoot him in his tracks, because our blood was heated with the fightin' and killin', but somethin'

about him made us hold our fire. He said he wasn't a Comanche, but was an old friend of Garfield's, and wanted to help him. He asked us to carry Jim into a clump of mesquite, and leave him alone with him, and to this day I don't know why we did, but we did. It was an awful time–the wounded moanin' and callin' for water, the starin' corpses strewn about the camp, night comin' on, and no way of knowin' that the Indians wouldn't return when dark fell.

"We made camp right there, because the horses were fagged out, and we watched all night, but the Comanches didn't come back. I don't know what went on out in the mesquite where Jim Garfield's body lay, because I never saw that strange Indian again; but durin' the night I kept hearin' a weird moanin' that wasn't made by the dyin' men, and an owl hooted from midnight till dawn.

"And at sunrise Jim Garfield came walkin' out of the mesquite, pale and haggard, but alive, and already the wound in his breast had closed and begun to heal. And since then he's never mentioned that wound, nor that fight, nor the strange Indian who came and went so mysteriously. And he hasn't aged a bit; he looks now just like he did then–a man of about fifty."

In the silence that followed, a car began to purr down the road, and twin shafts of light cut through the dusk.

"That's Doc Blaine," I said. "When I come back I'll tell you how Garfield is."

Doc Blaine was prompt with his predictions as we drove the three miles of post-oak covered hills that lay between Lost Knob and the Garfield farm.

"I'll be surprized to find him alive," he said, "smashed up like he is. A man his age ought to have more sense than to try to break a young horse."

"He doesn't look so old," I remarked.

"I'll be fifty, my next birthday," answered Doc Blaine. "I've known him all my life, and he must have been at least fifty the first time I ever saw him. His looks are deceiving."

Old Garfield’s dwelling-place was reminiscent of the past. The boards of the low squat house had never known paint. Orchard fence and corrals were built of rails.

Old Jim lay on his rude bed, tended crudely but efficiently by the man Doc Blaine had hired over the old man’s protests. As I looked at him, I was impressed anew by his evident vitality. His frame was stooped but unwithered, his limbs rounded out with springy muscles. In his corded neck and in his face, drawn though it was with suffering, was apparent an innate virility. His eyes, though partly glazed with pain, burned with the same unquenchable element.

“He’s been ravin’,” said Joe Braxton stolidly.

“First white man in this country,” muttered old Jim, becoming intelligible. “Hills no white man ever set foot in before. Gettin’ too old. Have to settle down. Can’t move on like I used to. Settle down here. Good country before it filled up with cow-men and squatters. Wish Ewen Cameron could see this country. The Mexicans shot him. Damn ’em!”

Doc Blaine shook his head. “He’s all smashed up inside. He won’t live till daylight.”

Garfield unexpectedly lifted his head and looked at us with clear eyes.

“Wrong, Doc,” he wheezed, his breath whistling with pain. “I’ll live. What’s broken bones and twisted guts? Nothin’! It’s the heart that counts. Long as the heart keeps pumpin’, a man can’t die. My heart’s sound. Listen to it! Feel of it!”

He groped painfully for Doc Blaine’s wrist, dragged his hand to his bosom and held it there, staring up into the doctor’s face with avid intensity.

“Regular dynamo, ain’t it?” he gasped. “Stronger’n a gasoline engine!”

Blaine beckoned me. “Lay your hand here,” he said, placing my hand on the old man’s bare breast. “He does have a remarkable heart action.”

I noted, in the light of the coal-oil lamp, a great livid scar in the gaunt arching breast–such a scar as might be made by a flint-headed spear. I laid my hand directly on this scar, and an exclamation escaped my lips.

Under my hand old Jim Garfield's heart pulsed, but its throb was like no other heart action I have ever observed. Its power was astounding; his ribs vibrated to its steady throb. It felt more like the vibrating of a dynamo than the action of a human organ. I could feel its amazing vitality radiating from his breast, stealing up into my hand and up my arm, until my own heart seemed to speed up in response.

"I can't die," old Jim gasped. "Not so long as my heart's in my breast. Only a bullet through the brain can kill me. And even then I wouldn't be rightly dead, as long as my heart beats in my breast. Yet it ain't rightly mine, either. It belongs to Ghost Man, the Lipan chief. It was the heart of a god the Lipans worshipped before the Comanches drove 'em out of their native hills.

"I knew Ghost Man down on the Rio Grande, when I was with Ewen Cameron. I saved his life from the Mexicans once. He tied the string of ghost wampum between him and me–the wampum no man but me and him can see or feel. He came when he knowed I needed him, in that fight up on the headwaters of Locust Creek, when I got this scar.

"I was dead as a man can be. My heart was sliced in two, like the heart of a butchered beef steer.

"All night Ghost Man did magic, callin' my ghost back from spirit-land. I remember that flight, a little. It was dark, and gray-like, and I drifted through gray mists and heard the dead wailin' past me in the mist.

But Ghost Man brought me back.

"He took out what was left of my mortal heart, and put the heart of the god in my bosom. But it's his, and when I'm through with it, he'll come for it. It's kept me alive and strong for the lifetime of a man. Age can't touch me. What do I care if these fools around here call me an old liar? What I know, I know. But hark'ee!"

His fingers became claws, clamping fiercely on Doc Blaine's wrist. His old eyes, old yet strangely young, burned fierce as those of an eagle under his bushy brows.

"If by some mischance I *should* die, now or later, promise me this! Cut into my bosom and take out the heart Ghost Man lent me so long ago! It's his. And as long as it beats in my body, my spirit'll be tied to that body, though my head be crushed like an egg underfoot! A livin' thing in a rottin' body! Promise!"

"All right, I promise," replied Doc Blaine, to humor him, and old Jim Garfield sank back with a whistling sigh of relief.

He did not die that night, nor the next, nor the next. I well remember the next day, because it was that day that I had the fight with Jack Kirby.

People will take a good deal from a bully, rather than to spill blood. Because nobody had gone to the trouble of killing him, Kirby thought the whole countryside was afraid of him.

He had bought a steer from my father, and when my father went to collect for it, Kirby told him that he had paid the money to me–which was a lie. I went looking for Kirby, and came upon him in a bootleg joint, boasting of his toughness, and telling the crowd that he was going to beat me up and make me say that he had paid me the money, and that I had stuck it into my own pocket. When I heard him say that, I saw red, and ran in on him with a stockman's knife, and cut him across the face, and in the neck, side, breast and belly, and the only thing that saved his life was the fact that the crowd pulled me off.

There was a preliminary hearing, and I was indicted on a charge of assault, and my trial was set for the following term of court. Kirby was as tough-fibered as a post-oak country bully ought to be, and he recovered, swearing vengeance, for he was vain of his looks, though God knows why, and I had permanently impaired them.

And while Jack Kirby was recovering, old man Garfield recovered too, to the amazement of everybody, especially Doc Blaine.

I well remember the night Doc Blaine took me again out to old Jim Garfield's farm. I was in Shifty Corlan's joint, trying to drink enough of the slop he called beer to get a kick out of it, when Doc Blaine came in and persuaded me to go with him.

As we drove along the winding old road in Doc's car, I asked: "Why are you insistent that I go with you this particular night? This isn't a professional call, is it?"

"No," he said. "You couldn't kill old Jim with a post-oak maul. He's completely recovered from injuries that ought to have killed an ox. To tell the truth, Jack Kirby is in Lost Knob, swearing he'll shoot you on sight."

"Well, for God's sake!" I exclaimed angrily. "Now everybody'll think I left town because I was afraid of him. Turn around and take me back, damn it!"

"Be reasonable," said Doc. "Everybody knows you're not afraid of Kirby. Nobody's afraid of him now.

His bluff 's broken, and that's why he's so wild against you. But you can't afford to have any more trouble with him now, and your trial only a short time off."

I laughed and said: "Well, if he's looking for me hard enough, he can find me as easily at old Garfield's as in town, because Shifty Corlan heard you say where we were going. And Shifty's hated me ever since I skinned him in that horse-swap last fall. He'll tell Kirby where I went."

"I never thought of that," said Doc Blaine, worried.

"Hell, forget it," I advised. "Kirby hasn't got guts enough to do anything but blow."

But I was mistaken. Puncture a bully's vanity and you touch his one vital spot.

Old Jim had not gone to bed when we got there. He was sitting in the room opening on to his sagging porch, the room which was at once living-room

and bedroom, smoking his old cob pipe and trying to read a newspaper by the light of his coal-oil lamp. All the windows and doors were wide open for the coolness, and the insects which swarmed in and fluttered around the lamp didn't seem to bother him.

We sat down and discussed the weather–which isn't so inane as one might suppose, in a country where men's livelihood depends on sun and rain, and is at the mercy of wind and drouth. The talk drifted into other kindred channels, and after some time, Doc Blaine bluntly spoke of something that hung in his mind.

"Jim," he said, "that night I thought you were dying, you babbled a lot of stuff about your heart, and an Indian who lent you his. How much of that was delirium?"

"None, Doc," said Garfield, pulling at his pipe. "It was gospel truth. Ghost Man, the Lipan priest of the Gods of Night, replaced my dead, torn heart with one from somethin' he worshipped. I ain't sure myself just what that somethin' is–somethin' from away back and a long way off, he said. But bein' a god, it can do without its heart for awhile. But when I die–if I ever get my head smashed so my consciousness is destroyed–the heart must be given back to Ghost Man."

"You mean you were in earnest about cutting out your heart?" demanded Doc Blaine.

"It has to be," answered old Garfield. "A livin' thing in a dead thing is opposed to nat'er. That's what Ghost Man said."

"Who the devil *was* Ghost Man?"

"I told you. A witch-doctor of the Lipans, who dwelt in this country before the Comanches came down from the Staked Plains and drove 'em south across the Rio Grande. I was a friend to 'em. I reckon Ghost Man is the only one left alive."

"Alive? Now?"

“I dunno,” confessed old Jim. “I dunno whether he’s alive or dead. I dunno whether he was alive when he came to me after the fight on Locust Creek, or even if he was alive when I knowed him in the southern country. Alive as we understand life, I mean.”

“What balderdash is this?” demanded Doc Blaine uneasily, and I felt a slight stirring in my hair. Outside was stillness, and the stars, and the black shadows of the post-oak woods. The lamp cast old Garfield’s shadow grotesquely on the wall, so that it did not at all resemble that of a human, and his words were strange as words heard in a nightmare.

“I knowed you wouldn’t understand,” said old Jim. “I don’t understand myself, and I ain’t got the words to explain them things I feel and know without understandin’. The Lipans were kin to the Apaches, and the Apaches learnt curious things from the Pueblos. Ghost Man *was*–that’s all I can say–alive or dead, I don’t know, but he *was*. What’s more, he *is*.”

“Is it you or me that’s crazy?” asked Doc Blaine.

“Well,” said old Jim, “I’ll tell you this much–Ghost Man knew Coronado.”

“Crazy as a loon!” murmured Doc Blaine. Then he lifted his head. “What’s that?”

“Horse turning in from the road,” I said. “Sounds like it stopped.”

I stepped to the door, like a fool, and stood etched in the light behind me. I got a glimpse of a shadowy bulk I knew to be a man on a horse; then Doc Blaine yelled: “Look out!” and threw himself against me, knocking us both sprawling. At the same instant I heard the smashing report of a rifle, and old Garfield grunted and fell heavily.

“Jack Kirby!” screamed Doc Blaine. “He’s killed Jim!”

I scrambled up, hearing the clatter of retreating hoofs, snatched old Jim’s shotgun from the wall, rushed recklessly out on to the sagging porch and let go both barrels at the fleeing shape, dim in the starlight. The charge was too light to kill at that range, but the bird-shot stung the horse and maddened

him. He swerved, crashed headlong through a rail fence and charged across the orchard, and a peach tree limb knocked his rider out of the saddle. He never moved after he hit the ground. I ran out there and looked down at him. It was Jack Kirby, right enough, and his neck was broken like a rotten branch.

I let him lie, and ran back to the house. Doc Blaine had stretched old Garfield out on a bench he'd dragged in from the porch, and Doc's face was whiter than I'd ever seen it. Old Jim was a ghastly sight; he had been shot with an old-fashioned .45-70, and at that range the heavy ball had literally torn off the top of his head. His features were masked with blood and brains. He had been directly behind me, poor old devil, and he had stopped the slug meant for me.

Doc Blaine was trembling, though he was anything but a stranger to such sights.

"Would you pronounce him dead?" he asked.

"That's for you to say." I answered. "But even a fool could tell that he's dead."

"He *is* dead," said Doc Blaine in a strained unnatural voice. "Rigor mortis is already setting in. But feel his heart!"

I did, and cried out. The flesh was already cold and clammy; but beneath it that mysterious heart still hammered steadily away, like a dynamo in a deserted house. No blood coursed through those veins; yet the heart pounded, pounded, pounded, like the pulse of Eternity.

"A living thing in a dead thing," whispered Doc Blaine, cold sweat on his face. "This is opposed to nature. I am going to keep the promise I made him. I'll assume full responsibility. This is too monstrous to ignore."

Our implements were a butcher-knife and a hack-saw. Outside only the still stars looked down on the black post-oak shadows and the dead man that lay in the orchard. Inside, the old lamp flickered, making strange shadows move and shiver and cringe in the corners, and glistened on the blood on the

floor, and the red-dabbled figure on the bench. The only sound inside was the crunch of the saw-edge in bone; outside an owl began to hoot weirdly.

Doc Blaine thrust a red-stained hand into the aperture he had made, and drew out a red, pulsing object that caught the lamplight. With a choked cry he recoiled, and the thing slipped from his fingers and fell on the table. And I too cried out involuntarily. For it did not fall with a soft meaty thud, as a piece of flesh should fall. It *thumped* hard on the table.

Impelled by an irresistible urge, I bent and gingerly picked up old Garfield's heart. The feel of it was brittle, unyielding, like steel or stone, but smoother than either. In size and shape it was the duplicate of a human heart, but it was slick and smooth, and its crimson surface reflected the lamplight like a jewel more lambent than any ruby; and in my hand it still throbbed mightily, sending vibratory radiations of energy up my arm until my own heart seemed swelling and bursting in response. It was cosmic *power*, beyond my comprehension, concentrated into the likeness of a human heart.

The thought came to me that here was a dynamo of life, the nearest approach to immortality that is possible for the destructible human body, the materialization of a cosmic secret more wonderful than the fabulous fountain sought for by Ponce de Leon. My soul was drawn into that unterrestrial gleam, and I suddenly wished passionately that it hammered and thundered in my own bosom in place of my paltry heart of tissue and muscle.

Doc Blaine ejaculated incoherently. I wheeled.

The noise of his coming had been no greater than the whispering of a night wind through the corn. There in the doorway he stood, tall, dark, inscrutable–an Indian warrior, in the paint, war bonnet, breech-clout and moccasins of an elder age. His dark eyes burned like fires gleaming deep under fathomless black lakes. Silently he extended his hand, and I dropped Jim Garfield's heart into it. Then without a word he turned and stalked into the night. But when Doc Blaine and I rushed out into the yard an instant later, there was no sign of any human being. He had vanished like a phantom of the night, and only something that looked like an owl was flying, dwindling from sight, into the rising moon.

Kelly the Conjure-Man

There are strange tales told when the full moon shines

Of voodoo nights when the ghost-things ran–

But the strangest figure among the pines

Was Kelly the conjure-man.

About seventy-five miles north-east of the great Smackover oil field of Arkansas lies a densely wooded country of pinelands and rivers, rich in folklore and tradition. Here, in the early 1850s came a sturdy race of Scotch-Irish pioneers pushing back the frontier and hewing homes in the tangled wilderness.

Among the many picturesque characters of those early days, one figure stands out, sharply, yet dimly limned against a background of dark legendry and horrific fable–the sinister figure of Kelly, the black conjurer.

Son of a Congo ju-ju man, legend whispered, Kelly, born a slave, exercised in his day unfathomed power among the darkest of the Ouachita pinelands. Where he came from is not exactly known; he drifted into the country shortly after the Civil War and mystery was attendant on his coming as upon all his actions.

Kelly did little work with his hands, and he did not mingle overmuch with his kind. They came to him; he never came to them. His cabin stood on the banks of Tulip Creek, a dark, serpent-like stream winding through the deep overhanging shadows of the pines, and there Kelly lived apart in dark and silent majesty.

A fine figure of barbaric manhood he was, perhaps six foot in height, mighty shouldered, supple like a great black panther. He always wore a vivid red flannel shirt, and great gold rings in his ears and nose heightened the bizarre and fantastic imagery of his appearance. He had little to say to white men or black.

Silently, like an uncrowned king of dark Africa he stalked along the roads, looming like a dark inscrutable wizard among the pinelands. His eyes were deep, murky, far-seeing, and his skin was black as tropical night. The very aura of the jungle hung about him and people feared him, perhaps sensing something sinister, something abysmal that lurked in the black waters of his soul and peered through his murky eyes.

He was, indeed, incongruous in his environments. He belonged in another age–another land–another setting. He belonged in the haunted shadows of a fetish hut, lapped by the monstrous, brutish slumber of ancient Africa.

Kelly the “conjer man” they called him, and to his cabin on lonely Tulip Creek came the black people on mysterious errands. Furtively they stole like shadows through the sombre blackness of the pinelands but what went on in that dim cabin no white man ever knew.

Kelly was a professed dealer in charms, and a dispeller of “conjers.” The black folk came to him to have spells lifted from their souls where enemies had placed them by curses and incantations. More, he was a healer–at least he claimed to heal the black people of their diseases. Tuberculosis was rare among white people in that locality, but negroes were subject to its ravages, and these victims Kelly professed to heal.

His methods were unique; he burnt snake bones to powder and sifted the powder in an incision made in the victim’s arm by means of a lancet made from an old razor. It is a matter of doubt whether anyone was ever healed by these methods–in fact, there is reason to believe the results were appallingly the opposite.

Perhaps Kelly did not himself believe he could combat tuberculosis in this manner; perhaps it was but a ruse to get the victim in his power; this is but a supposition, but primitive peoples have strange ways of bringing their fellows under their sway. Among some tribes it is but necessary to procure a lock of hair, a finger nail, a drop of blood, over which to utter certain incantations and perform certain rituals. Then, in the mind of the spell-weaver, and in the mind of the victim as well, the latter is completely under control.

And there is the magic of molding a figure of the intended victim from clay. Pins stuck in this figure cause the human model to die agonizingly; place the clay figure in a stream, and as the water dissolves it, the human victim withers and fades away into slow dissolution. All these things are solemn truths in the minds of the voodooists.

Be that as it may, Kelly soon began to exercize unusual powers over the darkies of the locality. From a dispeller of “conjers” he became, it would seem, a weaver of spells himself. Negroes began to go violently insane, and rumor laid their obsessions at Kelly’s door. Whether the cause of their insanity was physical or mental was not known, but that their minds were affected by some uncanny thing was well evident. They were obsessed by the horrible belief that their stomachs were full of living snakes, created by the spell of some master-conjurer, and at the mention of this nameless wizard, suspicion turned to Kelly. Was it hypnosis, some obscure malady or maddening drug, or the action of sheer fear? No white man knew, yet the victims were indisputably mad.

In every community of whites and blacks, at least in the South, a deep, dark current flows forever, out of sight of the whites who but dimly suspect its existence. A dark current of colored folks’ thoughts, deeds, ambitions and aspirations, like a river flowing unseen through the jungle. No white man ever knew why Kelly–if Kelly it were–drove black men and black women mad. What was the secret of grim power, what the secret of his dark ambitions, no white man ever knew.

And Kelly never spoke of them, certainly; he went his way, silent, brooding, darkly majestic, that satanic something growing in his shadowy eyes until he seemed to look on white people as if they too were blind mewling puppets in the hollow of his black hand.

Then, in the late ’70s, Kelly vanished. The word is to be taken literally. His cabin on Tulip Creek stood empty, the slab door sagging open on the wooden hinges, and he was seen no more, stalking like a dark ghost through the pinelands. Perhaps the colored people knew, but they never spoke. He had come in mystery, in mystery he lived, and in mystery he went and no man knew the road of his going. At least no man ever admitted that he knew. Perhaps the gloomy waters knew. Perhaps Kelly’s victims turned on

him at last. That lonely cabin in the black shadows of the moaning pines might have known a grisly midnight crime; the dusky waters of Tulip Creek might have received a form that splashed soggily and silently sank.

Or perhaps the conjure-man merely went his mysterious way in the night for reasons of his own, and on some other river pursued his fantastic career. None knows. Mystery hangs over his coming and his going, like a cloud impenetrable as night among the piney-woods, than which there is no blacker darkness this side Oblivion.

But even today his shadow haunts the long dim river-reaches and when the wind drones through the black pines under the stars, the old black people will tell you it is the spirit of the conjure-man whispering to the dead in the black shadows of the pinelands.

Black Canaan

I

CALL FROM CANAAN

“Trouble on Tularoosa Creek!” A warning to send cold fear along the spine of any man who was raised in that isolated back-country, called Canaan, that lies between Tularoosa and Black River–to send him racing back to that swamp-bordered region, wherever the word might reach him.

It was only a whisper from the withered lips of a shuffling black crone, who vanished among the throng before I could seize her; but it was enough. No need to seek confirmation; no need to inquire by what mysterious, black-folk way the word had come to her. No need to inquire what obscure forces worked to unseal those wrinkled lips to a Black River man. It was enough that the warning had been given–and understood.

Understood? How could any Black River man fail to understand that warning? It could have but one meaning–old hates seething again in the jungle-deeps of the swamplands, dark shadows slipping through the cypress, and massacre stalking out of the black, mysterious village that broods on the moss-festooned shore of sullen Tularoosa.

Within an hour New Orleans was falling further behind me with every turn of the churning wheel. To every man born in Canaan, there is always an invisible tie that draws him back whenever his homeland is imperiled by the murky shadow that has lurked in its jungled recesses for more than half a century.

The fastest boats I could get seemed maddeningly slow for that race up the big river, and up the smaller, more turbulent stream. I was burning with impatience when I stepped off on the Sharpsville landing, with the last fifteen miles of my journey yet to make. It was past midnight, but I hurried to the livery stable where, by tradition half a century old, there is always a Buckner horse, day or night.

As a sleepy black boy fastened the cinches, I turned to the owner of the stable, Joe Lafely, yawning and gaping in the light of the lantern he upheld. “There are rumors of trouble on Tularoosa?”

He paled in the lantern-light.

“I don’t know. I’ve heard talk. But you people in Canaan are a shut-mouthed clan. No one *outside* knows what goes on in there–”

The night swallowed his lantern and his stammering voice as I headed west along the pike.

The moon set red through the black pines. Owls hooted away off in the woods, and somewhere a hound howled his ancient wistfulness to the night. In the darkness that foreruns dawn I crossed Nigger Head Creek, a streak of shining black fringed by walls of solid shadows. My horse’s hoofs splashed through the shallow water and clinked on the wet stones, startlingly loud in the stillness. Beyond Nigger Head Creek began the country men called Canaan.

Heading in the same swamp, miles to the north, that gives birth to Tularoosa, Nigger Head flows due south to join Black River a few miles west of Sharpsville, while the Tularoosa runs westward to meet the same river at a higher point. The trend of Black River is from northwest to

southeast; so these three streams form the great irregular triangle known as Canaan.

In Canaan lived the sons and daughters of the white frontiersmen who first settled the country, and the sons and daughters of their slaves. Joe Lafely was right; we were an isolated, shut-mouthed breed, self-sufficient, jealous of our seclusion and independence.

Beyond Nigger Head the woods thickened, the road narrowed, winding through unfenced pinelands, broken by live-oaks and cypresses. There was no sound except the soft clop-clop of hoofs in the thin dust, the creak of the saddle. Then someone laughed throatily in the shadows.

I drew up and peered into the trees. The moon had set and dawn was not yet come, but a faint glow quivered among the trees, and by it I made out a dim figure under the moss-hung branches. My hand instinctively sought the butt of one of the dueling-pistols I wore, and the action brought another low, musical laugh, mocking yet seductive. I glimpsed a brown face, a pair of scintillant eyes, white teeth displayed in an insolent smile.

“Who the devil are you?” I demanded.

“Why do you ride so late, Kirby Buckner?” Taunting laughter bubbled in the voice. The accent was foreign and unfamiliar; a faintly negroid twang was there, but it was rich and sensuous as the rounded body of its owner. In the lustrous pile of dusky hair a great white blossom glimmered palely in the darkness.

“What are you doing here?” I demanded. “You’re a long way from any darky cabin. And you’re a stranger to me.”

“I came to Canaan since you went away,” she answered. “My cabin is on the Tularoosa. But now I’ve lost my way. And my poor brother has hurt his leg and cannot walk.”

“Where is your brother?” I asked, uneasily. Her perfect English was disquieting to me, accustomed as I was to the dialect of the black folk.

“Back in the woods, there–far back!” She indicated the black depths with a swaying motion of her supple body rather than a gesture of her hand, smiling audaciously as she did so.

I knew there was no injured brother, and she knew I knew it, and laughed at me. But a strange turmoil of conflicting emotions stirred in me. I had never before paid any attention to a black or brown woman. But this quadroon girl was different from any I had ever seen. Her features were regular as a white woman’s, and her speech was not that of a common wench. Yet she was barbaric, in the open lure of her smile, in the gleam of her eyes, in the shameless posturing of her voluptuous body. Every gesture, every motion she made set her apart from the ordinary run of women; her beauty was untamed and lawless, meant to madden rather than to soothe, to make a man blind and dizzy, to rouse in him all the unreined passions that are his heritage from his ape ancestors.

I hardly remember dismounting and tying my horse. My blood pounded suffocatingly through the veins in my temples as I scowled down at her, suspicious yet fascinated.

“How do you know my name? Who *are* you?”

With a provocative laugh, she seized my hand and drew me deeper into the shadows. Fascinated by the lights gleaming in her dark eyes, I was hardly aware of her action.

“Who does not know Kirby Buckner?” she laughed. “All the people of Canaan speak of you, white or black. Come! My poor brother longs to look upon you!” And she laughed with malicious triumph.

It was this brazen effrontery that brought me to my senses. Its cynical mockery broke the almost hypnotic spell in which I had fallen.

I stopped short, throwing her hand aside, snarling: “What devil’s game are you up to, wench?”

Instantly the smiling siren was changed to a blood-mad jungle cat. Her eyes flamed murderously, her red lips writhed in a snarl as she leaped back,

crying out shrilly. A rush of bare feet answered her call. The first faint light of dawn struck through the branches, revealing my assailants, three gaunt black giants. I saw the gleaming whites of their eyes, their bare glistening teeth, the sheen of naked steel in their hands.

My first bullet crashed through the head of the tallest man, knocking him dead in full stride. My second pistol snapped–the cap had somehow slipped from the nipple. I dashed it into a black face, and as the man fell, half stunned, I whipped out my bowie knife and closed with the other. I parried his stab and my counter-stroke ripped across his belly-muscles. He screamed like a swamp-panther and made a wild grab for my knife wrist, but I stuck him in the mouth with my clenched left fist, and felt his lips split and his teeth crumble under the impact as he reeled backward, his knife waving wildly. Before he could regain his balance I was after him, thrusting, and got home under his ribs. He groaned and slipped to the ground in a puddle of his own blood.

I wheeled about, looking for the other. He was just rising, blood streaming down his face and neck. As I started for him he sounded a panicky yell and plunged into the underbrush. The crashing of his blind flight came back to me, muffled with distance. The girl was gone.

II

THE STRANGER ON TULAROOSA

The curious glow that had first showed me the quadroon girl had vanished. In my confusion I had forgotten it. But I did not waste time on vain conjecture as to its source, as I groped my way back to the road. Mystery had come to the pinelands and a ghostly light that hovered among the trees was only part of it.

My horse snorted and pulled against his tether, frightened by the smell of blood that hung in the heavy damp air. Hoofs clattered down the road, forms bulked in the growing light. Voices challenged.

“Who’s that? Step out and name yourself, before we shoot!”

“Hold on, Esau!” I called. “It’s me–Kirby Buckner.”

“Kirby Buckner, by thunder!” ejaculated Esau McBride, lowering his pistol. The tall rangy forms of the other riders loomed behind him.

“We heard a shot,” said McBride. “We was ridin’ patrol on the roads around Grimesville like we’ve been ridin’ every night for a week now–ever since they killed Ridge Jackson.”

“Who killed Ridge Jackson?”

“The swamp niggers. That’s all we know. Ridge come out of the woods early one mornin’ and knocked at Cap’n Sorley’s door. Cap’n says he was the color of ashes. He hollered for the Cap’n for God’s sake to let him in, he had somethin’ awful to tell him. Well, the Cap’n started down to open the door, but before he’d got down the stairs he heard an awful row among the dogs outside, and a man screamed he reckoned was Ridge. And when he got to the door, there wasn’t nothin’ but a dead dog layin’ in the yard with his head knocked in, and the others all goin’ crazy. They found Ridge later, out in the pines a few hundred yards from the house. From the way the ground and the bushes was tore up, he’d been dragged that far by four or five men. Maybe they got tired of haulin’ him along. Anyway, they beat his head into a pulp and left him layin’ there.”

“I’ll be damned!” I muttered. “Well, there’s a couple of niggers lying back there in the brush. I want to see if you know them. I don’t.”

A moment later we were standing in the tiny glade, now white in the growing dawn. A black shape sprawled on the matted pine needles, his head in a pool of blood and brains. There were wide smears of blood on the ground and bushes on the other side of the little clearing, but the wounded black was gone.

McBride turned the carcass with his foot.

“One of them niggers that came in with Saul Stark,” he muttered.

“Who the devil’s that?” I demanded.

“Strange nigger that moved in since you went down the river last time. Come from South Carolina, he says. Lives in that old cabin in the Neck–you know, the shack where Colonel Reynolds’ niggers used to live.”

“Suppose you ride on to Grimesville with me, Esau,” I said, “and tell me about this business as we ride.

The rest of you might scout around and see if you can find a wounded nigger in the brush.”

They agreed without question; the Buckners have always been tacitly considered leaders in Canaan, and it came natural for me to offer suggestions. Nobody gives *orders* to white men in Canaan.

“I reckoned you’d be showin’ up soon,” opined McBride, as we rode along the whitening road. “You usually manage to keep up with what’s happenin’ in Canaan.”

“What *is* happening?” I inquired. “I don’t know anything. An old black woman dropped me the word in New Orleans that there was trouble. Naturally I came home as fast as I could. Three strange niggers waylaid me–” I was curiously disinclined to mention the woman. “And now you tell me somebody killed Ridge Jackson. What’s it all about?”

“The swamp niggers killed Ridge to shut his mouth,” announced McBride. “That’s the only way to figure it. They must have been close behind him when he knocked on Cap’n Sorley’s door. Ridge worked for Cap’n Sorley most of his life; he thought a lot of the old man. Some kind of deviltry’s bein’ brewed up in the swamps, and Ridge wanted to warn the Cap’n. That’s the way I figure it.”

“Warn him about what?”

“We don’t know,” confessed McBride. “That’s why we’re all on edge. It must be an uprisin’.”

That word was enough to strike chill fear into the heart of any Canaan-dweller. The blacks had risen in 1845, and the red terror of that revolt was

not forgotten, nor the three lesser rebellions before it, when the slaves rose and spread fire and slaughter from Tularoosa to the shores of Black River. The fear of a black uprising lurked for ever in the depths of that forgotten back-country; the very children absorbed it in their cradles.

“What makes you think it might be an uprising?” I asked.

“The niggers have all quit the fields, for one thing. They’ve all got business in Goshen. I ain’t seen a nigger nigh Grimesville for a week. *The town niggers have pulled out. ”*

In Canaan we still draw a distinction born in antebellum days. “Town-niggers” are descendants of the house-servants of the old days, and most of them live in or near Grimesville. There are not many, compared to the mass of “swamp-niggers” who dwell on tiny farms along the creeks and the edge of the swamps, or in the black village of Goshen, on the Tularoosa. They are descendants of the field-hands of other days, and, untouched by the mellow civilization which refined the natures of the house-servants, they remain as primitive as their African ancestors.

“Where have the town-niggers gone?” I asked.

“Nobody knows. They lit out a week ago. Probably hidin’ down on Black River. If we win, they’ll come back. If we don’t, they’ll take refuge in Sharpsville.”

I found his matter-of-factness a bit ghastly, as if the actuality of the uprising were an assured fact.

“Well, what have you done?” I demanded.

“Ain’t much we could do,” he confessed. “The niggers ain’t made no open move, outside of killin’ Ridge Jackson; and we couldn’t prove who done that, or why they done it.

“They ain’t done nothin’ but clear out. But that’s mighty suspicious. We can’t keep from thinkin’ Saul Stark’s behind it.”

“Who is this fellow?” I asked.

“I told you all I know, already. He got permission to settle in that old deserted cabin on the Neck; a great big black devil that talks better English than I like to hear a nigger talk. But he was respectful enough. He had three or four big South Carolina bucks with him, and a brown wench which we don’t know whether she’s his daughter, sister, wife or what. He ain’t been in to Grimesville but that one time, and a few weeks after he came to Canaan, the niggers begun actin’ curious. Some of the boys wanted to ride over to Goshen and have a showdown, but that’s takin’ a desperate chance.”

I knew he was thinking of a ghastly tale told us by our grandfathers of how a punitive expedition from Grimesville was once ambushed and butchered among the dense thickets that masked Goshen, then a rendezvous for runaway slaves, while another red-handed band devastated Grimesville, left defenseless by that reckless invasion.

“Might take all the men to get Saul Stark,” said McBride. “And we don’t dare leave the town unprotected. But we’ll soon have to–hello, what’s this?”

We had emerged from the trees and were just entering the village of Grimesville, the community center of the white population of Canaan. It was not pretentious. Log cabins, neat and white-washed, were plentiful enough. Small cottages clustered about big, old-fashioned houses which sheltered the rude aristocracy of that backwoods democracy. All the “planter” families lived “in town.” “The country” was occupied by their tenants, and by the small independent farmers, white and black.

A small log cabin stood near the point where the road wound out of the deep forest. Voices emanated from it, in accents of menace, and a tall lanky figure, rifle in hand, stood at the door.

“Howdy, Esau!” this man hailed us. “By golly, if it ain’t Kirby Buckner! Glad to see you, Kirby.”

“What’s up, Dick?” asked McBride.

“Got a nigger in the shack, tryin’ to make him talk. Bill Reynolds seen him sneakin’ past the edge of town about daylight, and nabbed him.”

“Who is it?” I asked.

“Tope Sorley. John Willoughby’s gone after a blacksnake.”

With a smothered oath I swung off my horse and strode in, followed by McBride. Half a dozen men in boots and gun-belts clustered about a pathetic figure cowering on an old broken bunk. Tope Sorley (his forebears had adopted the name of the family that owned them, in slave days) was a pitiable sight just then. His skin was ashy, his teeth chattered spasmodically, and his eyes seemed to be trying to roll back into his head.

“Here’s Kirby!” ejaculated one of the men as I pushed my way through the group. “I’ll bet he’ll make this coon talk!”

“Here comes John with the blacksnake!” shouted someone, and a tremor ran through Tope Sorley’s shivering body.

I pushed aside the butt of the ugly whip thrust eagerly into my hand.

“Tope,” I said, “you’ve worked one of my father’s farms for years. Has any Buckner ever treated you any way but square?”

“Nossuh,” came faintly.

“Then what are you afraid of? Why don’t you speak up? Something’s going on in the swamps. *You* know, and I want you to tell us–why the town niggers have all run away, why Ridge Jackson was killed, why the swamp niggers are acting so mysteriously.”

“And what kind of devilment that cussed Saul Stark’s cookin’ up over on Tularoosa!” shouted one of the men.

Tope seemed to shrink into himself at the mention of Stark.

“I don’t dast,” he shuddered. “He’d put me in de swamp!”

“Who?” I demanded. “Stark? Is Stark a conjer man?”

Tope sank his head in his hands and did not answer. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

“Tope,” I said, “you know if you’ll talk, we’ll protect you. If you don’t talk, I don’t think Stark can treat you much rougher than these men are likely to. Now spill it–what’s it all about?”

He lifted desperate eyes.

“You-all got to lemme stay here,” he shuddered. “And guard me, and gimme money to git away on when de trouble’s over.”

“We’ll do all that,” I agreed instantly. “You can stay right here in this cabin, until you’re ready to leave for New Orleans or wherever you want to go.”

He capitulated, collapsed, and words tumbled from his livid lips.

“Saul Stark’s a conjer man. He come here because it’s way off in back-country. He aim to kill all de white folks in Canaan–”

A growl rose from the group, such a growl as rises unbidden from the throat of the wolf-pack that scents peril.

“He aim to make hisself king of Canaan. He sent me to spy dis mornin’ to see if Mistah Kirby got through. He sent men to waylay him on de road, cause he knowed Mistah Kirby was comin’ back to Canaan. Niggers makin’ voodoo on Tularoosa, for weeks now. Ridge Jackson was goin’ to tell Cap’n Sorley; so Stark’s niggers foller him and kill him. That make Stark mad. He ain’t want to *kill* Ridge; he want to put him in de swamp with Tunk Bixby and de others.”

“What are you talking about?” I demanded.

Far out in the woods rose a strange, shrill cry, like the cry of a bird. But no such bird ever called before in Canaan. Tope cried out as if in answer, and shriveled into himself. He sank down on the bunk in a veritable palsy of fear.

“That was a signal!” I snapped. “Some of you go out there.”

Half a dozen men hastened to follow my suggestion, and I returned to the task of making Tope renew his revelations. It was useless. Some hideous fear had sealed his lips. He lay shuddering like a stricken animal, and did not even seem to hear our questions. No one suggested the use of the blacksnake.

Anyone could see the Negro was paralyzed with terror.

Presently the searchers returned, empty-handed. They had seen no one, and the thick carpet of pine needles showed no foot-prints. The men looked at me expectantly. As Colonel Buckner’s son, leadership was expected of me.

“What about it, Kirby?” asked McBride. “Breckinridge and the others have just rode in. They couldn’t find that nigger you cut up.”

“There was another nigger I hit with a pistol,” I said. “Maybe he came back and helped him.” Still I could not bring myself to mention the brown girl. “Leave Tope alone. Maybe he’ll get over his scare after a while. Better keep a guard in the cabin all the time. The swamp niggers may try to get him as they got Ridge Jackson. Better scour the roads around the town, Esau; there may be some of them hiding in the woods.”

“I will. I reckon you’ll want to be gettin’ up to the house, now, and seein’ your folks.”

“Yes. And I want to swap these toys for a couple of .44s. Then I’m going to ride out and tell the country people to come into Grimesville. If it’s to be an uprising, we don’t know when it will commence.”

“You’re not goin’ alone!” protested McBride.

“I’ll be all right,” I answered impatiently. “All this may not amount to anything, but it’s best to be on the safe side. That’s why I’m going after the country folks. No, I don’t want anybody to go with me. Just in case the niggers do get crazy enough to attack the town, you’ll need every man

you’ve got. But if I can get hold of some of the swamp niggers and talk to them, I don’t think there’ll be any attack.”

“You won’t get a glimpse of them,” McBride predicted.

III

SHADOWS OVER CANAAN

It was not yet noon when I rode out of the village westward along the old road. Thick woods swallowed me quickly. Dense walls of pines marched with me on either hand, giving way occasionally to fields enclosed with straggling rail fences, with the log cabins of the tenants or owners close by, with the usual litters of tow-headed children and lank hound dogs.

Some of the cabins were empty. The occupants, if white, had already gone into Grimesville; if black they had gone into the swamps, or fled to the hidden refuge of the town niggers, according to their affiliations.

In any event, the vacancy of their hovels was sinister in its suggestion.

A tense silence brooded over the pinelands, broken only by the occasional wailing call of a plowman. My progress was not swift, for from time to time I turned off the main road to give warning to some lonely cabin huddled on the bank of one of the many thicket-fringed creeks. Most of these farms were south of the road; the white settlements did not extend far to the north; for in that direction lay Tularoosa Creek with its jungle-grown marshes that stretched inlets southward like groping fingers.

The actual warning was brief; there was no need to argue or explain. I called from the saddle: “Get into town; trouble’s brewing on Tularoosa.” Faces paled, and people dropped whatever they were doing: the men to grab guns and jerk mules from the plow to hitch to the wagons, the women to bundle necessary belongings together and shrill the children in from their play. As I rode I heard the cow-horns blowing up and down the creeks, summoning men from distant fields–blowing as they had not blown for a generation, a warning and a defiance which I knew carried to such ears as

might be listening in the edges of the swamplands. The country emptied itself behind me, flowing in thin but steady streams toward Grimesville.

The sun was swinging low among the topmost branches of the pines when I reached the Richardson cabin, the westernmost “white” cabin in Canaan. Beyond it lay the Neck, the angle formed by the junction of Tularoosa with Black River, a jungle-like expanse occupied only by scattered negro huts.

Mrs. Richardson called to me anxiously from the cabin stoop.

“Well, Mr. Kirby, I’m glad to see you back in Canaan! We been hearin’ the horns all evenin’, Mr.

Kirby. What’s it mean? It–it ain’t–”

“You and Joe better get the children and light out for Grimesville,” I answered. “Nothing’s happened yet, and may not, but it’s best to be on the safe side. All the people are going.”

“We’ll go right now!” she gasped, paling, as she snatched off her apron. “Lord, Mr. Kirby, you reckon they’ll cut us off before we can git to town?”

I shook my head. “They’ll strike at night, if at all. We’re just playing safe. Probably nothing will come of it.”

“I bet you’re wrong there,” she predicted, scurrying about in desperate activity. “I been hearin’ a drum beatin’ off toward Saul Stark’s cabin, off and on, for a week now. They beat drums back in the Big Uprisin’. My pappy’s told me about it many’s the time. The nigger skinned his brother alive. The horns was blowin’ all up and down the creeks, and the drums was beatin’ louder’n the horns could blow.

You’ll be ridin’ back with us, won’t you, Mr. Kirby?”

“No; I’m going to scout down along the trail a piece.”

“Don’t go too far. You’re liable to run into old Saul Stark and his devils. Lord! *Where* is that man? Joe!

Joe! ”

As I rode down the trail her shrill voice followed me, thin-edged with fear.

Beyond the Richardson farm pines gave way to live-oaks. The underbrush grew ranker. A scent of rotting vegetation impregnated the fitful breeze. Occasionally I sighted a nigger hut, half hidden under the trees, but always it stood silent and deserted. Empty nigger cabins meant but one thing: the blacks were collecting at Goshen, some miles to the east on the Tularoosa; and that gathering, too, could have but one meaning.

My goal was Saul Stark’s hut. My intention had been formed when I heard Tope Sorley’s incoherent tale. There could be no doubt that Saul Stark was the dominant figure in this web of mystery. With Saul Stark I meant to deal. That I might be risking my life was a chance any man must take who assumes the responsibility of leadership.

The sun slanted through the lower branches of the cypresses when I reached it–a log cabin set against a background of gloomy tropical jungle. A few steps beyond it began the uninhabitable swamp in which Tularoosa emptied its murky current into Black River. A reek of decay hung in the air; gray moss bearded the trees, and poisonous vines twisted in rank tangles.

I called: “Stark! Saul Stark! Come out here!”

There was no answer. A primitive silence hovered over the tiny clearing. I dismounted, tied my horse and approached the crude, heavy door. Perhaps this cabin held a clue to the mystery of Saul Stark; at least it doubtless contained the implements and paraphernalia of his noisome craft. The faint breeze dropped suddenly. The stillness became so intense it was like a physical impact. I paused, startled; it was as if some inner instinct had shouted urgent warning.

As I stood there every fiber of me quivered in response to that subconscious warning; some obscure, deep-hidden instinct sensed peril, as a man senses the presence of the rattlesnake in the darkness, or the swamp panther crouching in the bushes. I drew a pistol, sweeping the trees and bushes, but saw no shadow or movement to betray the ambush I feared. But my instinct

was unerring; what I sensed was not lurking in the woods about me; it was inside the cabin– *waiting*. Trying to shake off the feeling, and irked by a vague half-memory that kept twitching at the back of my brain, I again advanced. And again I stopped short, with one foot on the tiny stoop, and a hand half advanced to pull open the door. A chill shivering swept over me, a sensation like that which shakes a man to whom a flicker of lightning has revealed the black abyss into which another blind step would have hurled him. For the first time in my life I knew the meaning of fear; I knew that black horror lurked in that sullen cabin under the moss-bearded cypresses–a horror against which every primitive instinct that was my heritage cried out in panic.

And that insistent half-memory woke suddenly. It was the memory of a story of how voodoo men leave their huts guarded in their absence by a powerful ju-ju spirit to deal madness and death to the intruder.

White men ascribed such deaths to superstitious fright and hypnotic suggestion. But in that instant I understood my sense of lurking peril; I comprehended the horror that breathed like an invisible mist from that accursed hut. I sensed the reality of the ju-ju, of which the grotesque wooden images which voodoo men place in their huts are only a symbol.

Saul Stark was gone; but he had left a Presence to guard his hut.

I backed away, sweat beading the backs of my hands. Not for a bag of gold would I have peered into the shuttered windows or touched that unbolted door. My pistol hung in my hand, useless I knew against the *Thing* in that cabin. What it was I could not know, but I knew it was some brutish, soulless entity drawn from the black swamps by the spells of voodoo. Man and the natural animals are not the only sentient beings that haunt this planet. There are invisible *Things*–black spirits of the deep swamps and the slimes of the river beds–the negroes know of them….

My horse was trembling like a leaf and he shouldered close to me as if seeking security in bodily contact.

I mounted and reined away, fighting a panicky urge to strike in the spurs and bolt madly down the trail.

I breathed an involuntary sigh of relief as the somber clearing fell away behind me and was lost from sight. I did not, as soon as I was out of sight of the cabin, revile myself for a silly fool. My experience was too vivid in my mind. It was not cowardice that prompted my retreat from that empty hut; it was the natural instinct of self-preservation, such as keeps a squirrel from entering the lair of a rattlesnake.

My horse snorted and shied violently. A gun was in my hand before I saw what had startled me. Again a rich musical laugh taunted me.

She was leaning against a bent tree-trunk, her hands clasped behind her sleek head, insolently posing her sensuous figure. The barbaric fascination of her was not dispelled by daylight; if anything, the glow of the low-hanging sun enhanced it.

“Why did you not go into the ju-ju cabin, Kirby Buckner?” she mocked, lowering her arms and moving insolently out from the tree.

She was clad as I had never seen a swamp woman, or any other woman, dressed. Snakeskin sandals were on her feet, sewn with tiny sea-shells that were never gathered on this continent. A short silken skirt of flaming crimson molded her full hips, and was upheld by a broad bead-worked girdle. Barbaric anklets and armlets clashed as she moved, heavy ornaments of crudely hammered gold that were as African as her loftily piled coiffure. Nothing else she wore, and on her bosom, between her arching breasts, I glimpsed the faint lines of tattooing on her brown skin.

She posed derisively before me, not in allure, but in mockery. Triumphant malice blazed in her dark eyes; her red lips curled with cruel mirth. Looking at her then I found it easy to believe all the tales I had heard of torture and mutilations inflicted by the women of savage races on wounded enemies. She was alien, even in this primitive setting; she needed a grimmer, more bestial background, a background of steaming jungle, reeking black swamps, flaring fires and cannibal feasts, and the bloody altars of abysmal tribal gods.

“Kirby Buckner!” She seemed to caress the syllables with her red tongue, yet the very intonation was an obscene insult. “Why did you not enter Saul

Stark's cabin? It was not locked! Did you fear what you might see there? Did you fear you might come out with your hair white like an old man's, and the drooling lips of an imbecile?"

"What's in that hut?" I demanded.

She laughed in my face, and snapped her fingers with a peculiar gesture.

"One of the ones which come oozing like black mist out of the night when Saul Stark beats the ju-ju drum and shrieks the black incantation to the gods that crawl on their bellies in the swamp."

"What is he doing here? The black folk were quiet until he came."

Her red lips curled disdainfully. "Those black dogs? They are his slaves. If they disobey he kills them, *or puts them in the swamp*. For long we have looked for a place to begin our rule. We have chosen Canaan. You whites must go. And since we know that white people can never be driven away from their land, we must kill you all."

It was my turn to laugh, grimly.

"They tried that, back in '45."

"They did not have Saul Stark to lead them, then," she answered calmly.

"Well, suppose they won? Do you think that would be the end of it? Other white men would come into Canaan and kill them all."

"They would have to cross water," she answered. "We can defend the rivers and creeks. Saul Stark will have many *servants in the swamps* to do his bidding. He will be king of black Canaan. No one can cross the waters to come against him. He will rule his tribe, as his fathers ruled their tribes in the Ancient Land."

"Mad as a loon!" I muttered. Then curiosity impelled me to ask: "Who is this fool? What are you to him?"

“He is the son of a Kongo witch-finder, and he is the greatest voodoo priest out of the Ancient Land,”

she answered, laughing at me again. “I? You shall learn who I am, tonight in the swamp, in the House of Damballah.”

“Yes?” I grunted. “What’s to prevent me from taking you into Grimesville with me? You know the answers to questions I’d like to ask.”

Her laughter was like the slash of a velvet whip.

“*You* drag me to the village of the whites? Not all death and hell could keep me from the Dance of the Skull, tonight in the House of Damballah. You are *my* captive, already.” She laughed derisively as I started and glared into the shadows about me. “No one is hiding there. I am alone, and you are the strongest man in Canaan. Even Saul Stark fears you, for he sent me with three men to kill you before you could reach the village. Yet you are my captive. I have but to beckon, so”–she crooked a contemptuous finger–“and you will follow to the fires of Damballah and the knives of the torturers.”

I laughed at her, but my mirth rang hollow. I could not deny the incredible magnetism of this brown enchantress; it fascinated and impelled, drawing me toward her, beating at my will-power. I could not fail to recognize it any more than I could fail to recognize the peril in the ju-ju hut.

My agitation was apparent to her, for her eyes flashed with unholy triumph.

“Black men are fools, all but Saul Stark,” she laughed. “White men are fools, too. I am the daughter of a white man, who lived in the hut of a black king and mated with his daughters. I know the strength of white men, and their weakness. I failed last night when I met you in the woods, but now I cannot fail!”

Savage exultation thrummed in her voice. “By the blood in your veins I have snared you. The knife of the man you killed scratched your hand–seven drops of blood that fell on the pine needles have given me your soul! I took that blood, and Saul Stark gave me the man who ran away. Saul Stark hates cowards.

With his hot, quivering heart, and seven drops of your blood, Kirby Buckner, deep in the swamps I have made such magic as none but a Bride of Damballah can make. Already you feel its urge! Oh, you are strong! The man you fought with the knife died less than an hour later. But you cannot fight me. Your blood makes you my slave. I have put a conjurement upon you."

By heaven, it was not mere madness she was mouthing! Hypnotism, magic, call it what you will, I felt its onslaught on my brain and will–a blind, senseless impulse that seemed to be rushing me against my will to the brink of some nameless abyss.

"I have made a charm you cannot resist!" she cried. "When I call you, you will come! Into the deep swamps you will follow me. You will see the Dance of the Skull, and you will see the doom of a poor fool who sought to betray Saul Stark–who dreamed he could resist the Call of Damballah when it came.

Into the swamp he goes tonight, with Tunk Bixby and the other four fools who opposed Saul Stark. You shall see that. You shall know and understand your own doom. And then you too shall go into the swamp, into darkness and silence deep as the darkness of nighted Africa! But before the darkness engulfs you there will be sharp knives, and little fires–oh, you will scream for death, even for the death that is beyond death!"

With a choking cry I whipped out a pistol and leveled it full at her breast. It was cocked and my finger was on the trigger. At that range I could not miss. But she looked full into the black muzzle and laughed–laughed–laughed, in wild peals that froze the blood in my veins.

And I sat there like an image pointing a pistol I could not fire! A frightful paralysis gripped me. I knew, with numbing certainty, that my life depended on the pull of that trigger, but I could not crook my finger–not though every muscle in my body quivered with the effort and sweat broke out on my face in clammy beads.

She ceased laughing, then, and stood looking at me in a manner indescribably sinister.

“You cannot shoot me, Kirby Buckner,” she said quietly. “I have enslaved your soul. You cannot understand my power, but it has ensnared you. It is the Lure of the Bride of Damballah–the blood I have mixed with the mystic waters of Africa drawing the blood in your veins. Tonight you will come to me, in the House of Damballah.”

“You lie!” My voice was an unnatural croak bursting from dry lips. “You’ve hypnotized me, you she-devil, so I can’t pull this trigger. But you can’t drag me across the swamps to you.”

“It is you who lie,” she returned calmly. “You know you lie. Ride back toward Grimesville or wherever you will, Kirby Buckner. But when the sun sets and the black shadows crawl out of the swamps, you will see me beckoning you, and you will follow me. Long I have planned your doom, Kirby Buckner, since first I heard the white men of Canaan talking of you. It was I who sent the word down the river that brought you back to Canaan. Not even Saul Stark knows of my plans for you.

“At dawn Grimesville shall go up in flames, and the heads of the white men will be tossed in the blood-running streets. But tonight is the Night of Damballah, and a white sacrifice shall be given to the black gods. Hidden among the trees you shall watch the Dance of the Skull–and then I shall call you forth–to die! And now, go, fool! Run as far and as fast as you will. At sunset, wherever you are, you will turn your footsteps toward the House of Damballah!”

And with the spring of a panther she was gone into the thick brush, and as she vanished the strange paralysis dropped from me. With a gasped oath I fired blindly after her, but only a mocking laugh floated back to me.

Then in a panic I wrenched my horse about and spurred him down the trail. Reason and logic had momentarily vanished from my brain, leaving me in the grasp of blind, primitive fear. I had confronted sorcery beyond my power to resist. I had felt my will mastered by the mesmerism in a brown woman’s eyes. And now one driving urge overwhelmed me–a wild desire to cover as much distance as I could before that low-hanging sun dipped below the horizon and the black shadows came crawling from the swamps.

And yet I knew I could not outrun the grisly specter that menaced me. I was like a man fleeing in a nightmare, trying to escape from a monstrous phantom which kept pace with me despite my desperate speed.

I had not reached the Richardson cabin when above the drumming of my flight I heard the clop of hoofs ahead of me, and an instant later, sweeping around a kink in the trail, I almost rode down a tall, lanky man on an equally gaunt horse.

He yelped and dodged back as I jerked my horse to its haunches, my pistol presented at his breast.

“Look out, Kirby! It’s me–Jim Braxton! My God, you look like you’d seen a ghost! What’s chasin’

you?”

“Where are you going?” I demanded, lowering my gun.

“Lookin’ for you. Folks got worried as it got late and you didn’t come in with the refugees. I ’lowed I’d light out and look for you. Miz Richardson said you rode into the Neck. Where in tarnation you been?”

“To Saul Stark’s cabin.”

“You takin’ a big chance. What’d you find there?”

The sight of another white man had somewhat steadied my nerves. I opened my mouth to narrate my adventure, and was shocked to hear myself saying, instead: “Nothing. He wasn’t there.”

“Thought I heard a gun crack, a while ago,” he remarked, glancing sharply at me, sidewise.

“I shot at a copperhead,” I answered, and shuddered. This reticence regarding the brown woman was compulsory; I could no more speak of her than I could pull the trigger of the pistol aimed at her. And I cannot describe the horror that beset me when I realized this. The conjer spells the black

men feared were not lies, I realized sickly; demons in human form *did* exist who were able to enslave men's will and thoughts.

Braxton was eyeing me strangely.

"We're lucky the woods ain't full of black copperheads," he said. "Tope Sorley's pulled out."

"What do you mean?" By an effort I pulled myself together.

"Just that. Tom Breckinridge was in the cabin with him. Tope hadn't said a word since you talked to him.

Just laid on that bunk and shivered. Then a kind of holler begun way out in the woods, and Tom went to the door with his rifle-gun, but couldn't see nothin'. Well, while he was standin' there he got a lick on the head from *behind,* and as he fell he seen that crazy nigger Tope jump over him and light out for the woods. Tom he taken a shot at him, but missed. Now what you make of that?"

"The Call of Damballah!" I muttered, a chill perspiration beading my body. "God! The poor devil!"

"Huh? What's that?"

"For God's sake let's not stand here mouthing! The sun will soon be down!" In a frenzy of impatience I kicked my mount down the trail. Braxton followed me, obviously puzzled. With a terrific effort I got a grip on myself. How madly fantastic it was that Kirby Buckner should be shaking in the grip of unreasoning terror! It was so alien to my whole nature that it was no wonder Jim Braxton was unable to comprehend what ailed me.

"Tope didn't go of his own free will," I said. "That call was a summons he couldn't resist. Hypnotism, black magic, voodoo, whatever you want to call it, Saul Stark has some damnable power that enslaves men's will-power. The blacks are gathered somewhere in the swamp, for some kind of a devilish voodoo ceremony, which I have reason to believe will culminate in

the murder of Tope Sorley. We've got to get to Grimesville if we can. I expect an attack at dawn."

Braxton was pale in the dimming light. He did not ask me where I got my knowledge.

"We'll lick 'em when they come; but it'll be a slaughter."

I did not reply. My eyes were fixed with savage intensity on the sinking sun, and as it slid out of sight behind the trees I was shaken with an icy tremor. In vain I told myself that no occult power could draw me against my will. If she had been able to compel me, why had she not forced me to accompany her from the glade of the ju-ju hut? A grisly whisper seemed to tell me that she was but playing with me, as a cat allows a mouse almost to escape, only to be pounced upon again.

"Kirby, what's the matter with you?" I scarcely heard Braxton's anxious voice. "You're sweatin' and shakin' like you had the aggers. What–hey, what you stoppin' for?"

I had not consciously pulled on the rein, but my horse halted, and stood trembling and snorting, before the mouth of a narrow trail which meandered away at right angles from the road we were following–a trail that led north.

"Listen!" I hissed tensely.

"What is it?" Braxton drew a pistol. The brief twilight of the pinelands was deepening into dusk.

"Don't you hear it?" I muttered. "Drums! Drums beating in Goshen!"

"I don't hear nothin'," he mumbled uneasily. "If they was beatin' drums in Goshen you couldn't hear 'em this far away."

"Look there!" My sharp sudden cry made him start. I was pointing down the dim trail, at the figure which stood there in the dusk less than a hundred yards away. There in the dusk I saw her, even made out the gleam of her strange eyes, the mocking smile on her red lips. "Saul Stark's brown

wench!" I raved, tearing at my scabbard. "My God, man, are you stone-blind? Don't you see her?"

"I don't see nobody!" he whispered, livid. "What are you talkin' about, Kirby?"

With eyes glaring I fired down the trail, and fired again, and yet again. This time no paralysis gripped my arm. But the smiling face still mocked me from the shadows. A slender, rounded arm lifted, a finger beckoned imperiously; and then she was gone and I was spurring my horse down the narrow trail, blind, deaf and dumb, with a sensation as of being caught in a black tide that was carrying me with it as it rushed on to a destination beyond my comprehension.

Dimly I heard Braxton's urgent yells, and then he drew up beside me with a clatter of hoofs, and grabbed my reins, setting my horse back on its haunches. I remember striking at him with my gun-barrel, without realizing what I was doing. All the black rivers of Africa were surging and foaming within my consciousness, roaring into a torrent that was sweeping me down to engulf me in an ocean of doom.

"Kirby, are you crazy? This trail leads to Goshen!"

I shook my head dazedly. The foam of the rushing waters swirled in my brain, and my voice sounded far away. "Go back! Ride for Grimesville! I'm going to Goshen."

"Kirby, you're mad!"

"Mad or sane, I'm going to Goshen this night," I answered dully. I was fully conscious. I knew what I was saying, and what I was doing. I realized the incredible folly of my action, and I realized my inability to help myself. Some shred of sanity impelled me to try to conceal the grisly truth from my companion, to offer a rational reason for my madness. "Saul Stark is in Goshen. He's the one who's responsible for all this trouble. I'm going to kill him. That will stop the uprising before it starts."

He was trembling like a man with the ague.

“Then I’m goin’ with you.”

“You must go on to Grimesville and warn the people,” I insisted, holding to sanity, but feeling a strong urge begin to seize me, an irresistible urge to be in motion–to be riding in the direction toward which I was so horribly drawn.

“They’ll be on their guard,” he said stubbornly. “They won’t need my warnin’. I’m goin’ with you. I don’t know what’s got in you, but I ain’t goin’ to let you die alone among these black woods.”

I did not argue. I could not. The blind rivers were sweeping me on–on–on! And down the trail, dim in the dusk, I glimpsed a supple figure, caught the gleam of uncanny eyes, the crook of a lifted finger…. Then I was in motion, galloping down the trail, and I heard the drum of Braxton’s horse’s hoofs behind me.

IV

THE DWELLERS IN THE SWAMP

Night fell and the moon shone through the trees, blood-red behind the black branches. The horses were growing hard to manage.

“They got more sense’n us, Kirby,” muttered Braxton.

“Panther, maybe,” I replied absently, my eyes searching the gloom of the trail ahead.

“Naw, t’ain’t. Closer we git to Goshen, the worse they git. And every time we swing nigh to a creek they shy and snort.”

The trail had not yet crossed any of the narrow, muddy creeks that criss-crossed that end of Canaan, but several times it had swung so close to one of them that we glimpsed the black streak that was water glinting dully in the shadows of the thick growth. And each time, I remembered, the horses showed signs of fear.

But I had hardly noticed, wrestling as I was with the grisly compulsion that was driving me. Remember, I was not like a man in a hypnotic trance. I was fully awake, fully conscious. Even the daze in which I had seemed to hear the roar of black rivers had passed, leaving my mind clear, my thoughts lucid. And that was the sweating hell of it: to realize my folly clearly and poignantly, but to be unable to conquer it.

Vividly I realized that I was riding to torture and death, and leading a faithful friend to the same end. But on I went. My efforts to break the spell that gripped me almost unseated my reason, but on I went. I cannot explain my compulsion, any more than I can explain why a sliver of steel is drawn to a magnet. It was a black power beyond the ring of white man's knowledge; a basic, elemental thing of which formal hypnotism is but scanty crumbs, spilled at random. A power beyond my control was drawing me to Goshen, and beyond; more I cannot explain, any more than the rabbit could explain why the eyes of the swaying serpent draw him into its gaping jaws.

We were not far from Goshen when Braxton's horse unseated its rider, and my own began snorting and plunging.

"They won't go no closer!" gasped Braxton, fighting at the reins.

I swung off, threw the reins over the saddle-horn.

"Go back, for God's sake, Jim! I'm going on afoot."

I heard him whimper an oath, then his horse was galloping after mine, and he was following me on foot.

The thought that he must share my doom sickened me, but I could not dissuade him; and ahead of me a supple form was dancing in the shadows, luring me on–on–on….

I wasted no more bullets on that mocking shape. Braxton could not see it, and I knew it was part of my enchantment, no real woman of flesh and blood, but a hell-born will-o'-the-wisp, mocking me and leading me

through the night to a hideous death. A “sending,” the people of the Orient, who are wiser than we, call such a thing.

Braxton peered nervously at the black forest walls about us, and I knew his flesh was crawling with the fear of sawed-off shotguns blasting us suddenly from the shadows. But it was no ambush of lead or steel I feared as we emerged into the moonlit clearing that housed the cabins of Goshen.

The double line of log cabins faced each other across the dusty street. One line backed against the bank of Tularoosa Creek. The back stoops almost overhung the black waters. Nothing moved in the moonlight. No lights showed, no smoke oozed up from the stick-and-mud chimneys. It might have been a dead town, deserted and forgotten.

“It’s a trap!” hissed Braxton, his eyes blazing slits. He bent forward like a skulking panther, a gun in each hand. “They’re layin’ for us in them huts!”

Then he cursed, but followed me as I strode down the street. I did not hail the silent huts. I *knew* Goshen was deserted. I felt its emptiness. Yet there was a contradictory sensation as of spying eyes fixed upon us. I did not try to reconcile these opposite convictions.

“They’re gone,” muttered Braxton, nervously. “I can’t smell ’em. I can always smell niggers, if they’re a lot of ’em, or if they’re right close. You reckon they’ve already gone to raid Grimesville?”

“No,” I muttered. “They’re in the House of Damballah.”

He shot a quick glance at me.

“That’s a neck of land in the Tularoosa about three miles west of here. My grandpap used to talk about it. The niggers held their heathen palavers there back in slave times. You ain’t–Kirby–you–”

“Listen!” I wiped the icy sweat from my face. “*Listen!* ”

Through the black woodlands the faint throb of a drum whispered on the wind that glided up the shadowy reaches of the Tularoosa.

Braxton shivered. “It’s them, all right. But for God’s sake, Kirby– *look out!* ”

With an oath he sprang toward the houses on the bank of the creek. I was after him just in time to glimpse a dark clumsy object scrambling or tumbling down the sloping bank into the water. Braxton threw up his long pistol, then lowered it, with a baffled curse. A faint splash marked the disappearance of the creature. The shiny black surface crinkled with spreading ripples.

“What was it?” I demanded.

“A nigger on his all-fours!” swore Braxton. His face was strangely pallid in the moonlight. “He was crouched between them cabins there, watchin’ us!”

“It must have been an alligator.” What a mystery is the human mind! I was arguing for sanity and logic, I, the blind victim of a compulsion beyond sanity and logic. “A nigger would have to come up for air.”

“He swum under the water and come up in the shadder of the bresh where we couldn’t see him,”

maintained Braxton. “Now he’ll go warn Saul Stark.”

“Never mind!” The pulse was thrumming in my temples again, the roar of foaming waters rising irresistibly in my brain. “I’m going–straight through the swamp. For the last time, go back!”

“No! Sane or mad, I’m goin’ with you!”

The pulse of the drum was fitful, growing more distinct as we advanced. We struggled through jungle-thick growth; tangled vines tripped us; our boots sank in scummy mire. We were entering the fringe of the swamp which grew deeper and denser until it culminated in the uninhabitable morass where the Tularoosa flowed into Black River, miles farther to the west.

The moon had not yet set, but the shadows were black under the interlacing branches with their mossy beards. We plunged into the first creek we must

cross, one of the many muddy streams flowing into the Tularoosa. The water was only thigh-deep, the moss-clogged bottom fairly firm. My foot felt the edge of a sheer drop, and I warned Braxton: “Look out for a deep hole; keep right behind me.”

His answer was unintelligible. He was breathing heavily, crowding close behind me. Just as I reached the sloping bank and pulled myself up by the slimy, projecting roots, the water was violently agitated behind me. Braxton cried out incoherently, and hurled himself up the bank, almost upsetting me. I wheeled, gun in hand, but saw only the black water seething and whirling, after his thrashing rush through it.

“What the devil, Jim?”

“Somethin’ grabbed me!” he panted. “Somethin’ out of the deep hole. I tore loose and busted up the bank. I tell you, Kirby, somethin’s follerin’ us! Somethin’ that swims under the water.”

“Maybe it was that nigger you saw. These swamp people swim like fish. Maybe he swam up under the water to try to drown you.”

He shook his head, staring at the black water, gun in hand.

“It *smelt* like a nigger, and the little I saw of it *looked* like a nigger. But it didn’t *feel* like any kind of a human.”

“Well, it was an alligator then,” I muttered absently as I turned away. As always when I halted, even for a moment, the roar of peremptory and imperious rivers shook the foundations of my reason.

He splashed after me without comment. Scummy puddles rose about our ankles, and we stumbled over moss-grown cypress knees. Ahead of us there loomed another, wider creek, and Braxton caught my arm.

“Don’t do it, Kirby!” he gasped. “If we go into that water, it’ll git us sure!”

“What?”

“I don’t know. Whatever it was that flopped down that bank back there in Goshen. The same thing that grabbed me in that creek back yonder. Kirby, let’s go back.”

“Go back?” I laughed in bitter agony. “I wish to God I could! I’ve got to go on. Either Saul Stark or I must die before dawn.”

He licked dry lips and whispered, “Go on, then; I’m with you, come heaven or hell.” He thrust his pistol back into its scabbard, and drew a long keen knife from his boot. “Go ahead!”

I climbed down the sloping bank and splashed into the water that rose to my hips. The cypress branches bent a gloomy, moss-trailing arch over the creek. The water was black as midnight. Braxton was a blur, toiling behind me. I gained the first shelf of the opposite bank and paused, in water knee-deep, to turn and look back at him.

Everything happened at once, then. I saw Braxton halt short, staring at something on the bank behind me.

He cried out, whipped out a gun and fired, just as I turned. In the flash of the gun I glimpsed a supple form reeling backward, a brown face fiendishly contorted. Then in the momentary blindness that followed the flash, I heard Jim Braxton scream.

Sight and brain cleared in time to show me a sudden swirl of the murky water, a round, black object breaking the surface behind Jim–and then Braxton gave a strangled cry and went under with a frantic thrashing and splashing. With an incoherent yell I sprang into the creek, stumbled and went to my knees, almost submerging myself. As I struggled up I saw Braxton’s head, now streaming blood, break the surface for an instant, and I lunged toward it. It went under and another head appeared in its place, a shadowy black head. I stabbed at it ferociously, and my knife cut only the blank water as the thing dipped out of sight.

I staggered from the wasted force of the blow, and when I righted myself, the water lay unbroken about me. I called Jim’s name, but there was no answer. Then panic laid a cold hand on me, and I splashed to the bank,

sweating and trembling. With the water no higher than my knees I halted and waited, for I knew not what. But presently, down the creek a short distance, I made out a vague object lying in the shallow water near the shore.

I waded to it, through the clinging mud and crawling vines. It was Jim Braxton, and he was dead. It was not the wound in his head which had killed him. Probably he had struck a submerged rock when he was dragged under. But the marks of strangling fingers showed black on his throat. At the sight a nameless horror oozed out of that black swamp water and coiled itself clammily about my soul; for no human fingers ever left such marks as those.

I had seen a head rise in the water, a head that looked like that of a negro, though the features had been indistinct in the darkness. But no man, white or black, ever possessed the fingers that had crushed the life out of Jim Braxton. The distant drum grunted as if in mockery.

I dragged the body up on the bank and left it. I could not linger longer, for the madness was foaming in my brain again, driving me with white-hot spurs. But as I climbed the bank, I found blood on the bushes, and was shaken by the implication.

I remembered the figure I had seen staggering in the flash of Braxton's gun. *She* had been there, waiting for me on the bank, then–not a spectral illusion, but the woman herself, in flesh and blood! Braxton had fired at her, and wounded her. But the wound could not have been mortal; for no corpse lay among the bushes, and the grim hypnosis that dragged me onward was unweakened. Dizzily I wondered if she could be killed by mortal weapons.

The moon had set. The starlight scarcely penetrated the interwoven branches. No more creeks barred my way, only shallow streams, through which I splashed with sweating haste. Yet I did not expect to be attacked. Twice the dweller in the depths had passed me by to attack my companion. In icy despair I knew I was being saved for a grimmer fate. Each stream I crossed might be hiding the monster that killed Jim Braxton. Those creeks were all connected in a network of winding waterways. It could follow me

easily. But my horror of it was less than the horror of the jungle-born magnetism that lurked in a witch-woman's eyes.

And as I stumbled through the tangled vegetation, I heard the drum rumbling ahead of me, louder and louder, a demoniacal mockery. Then a human voice mingled with its mutter, in a long-drawn cry of horror and agony that set every fiber of me quivering with sympathy. Sweat coursed down my clammy flesh; soon my own voice might be lifted like that, under unnamable torture. But on I went, my feet moving like automatons, apart from my body, motivated by a will not my own.

The drum grew loud, and a fire glowed among the black trees. Presently, crouching among the bushes, I stared across the stretch of black water that separated me from a nightmare scene. My halting there was as compulsory as the rest of my actions had been. Vaguely I knew the stage for horror had been set, but the time for my entry upon it was not yet. When the time had come, I would receive my summons.

A low, wooded island split the black creek, connected with the shore opposite me by a narrow neck of land. At its lower end the creek split into a network of channels threading their way among hummocks and rotting logs and moss-grown, vine-tangled clumps of trees. Directly across from my refuge the shore of the island was deeply indented by an arm of open, deep black water. Bearded trees walled a small clearing, and partly hid a hut. Between the hut and the shore burned a fire that sent up weird twisting snake-tongues of green flames. Scores of black people squatted under the shadows of the overhanging branches. When the green fire lit their faces it lent them the appearance of drowned corpses.

In the midst of the glade stood a giant negro, an awesome statue in black marble. He was clad in ragged trousers, but on his head was a band of beaten gold set with a huge red jewel, and on his feet were barbaric sandals. His features reflected titanic vitality no less than his huge body. But he was all negro–flaring nostrils, thick lips, ebony skin. I knew I looked upon Saul Stark, the conjure man.

He was regarding something that lay in the sand before him, something dark and bulky that moaned feebly. Presently, lifting his head, he rolled out

a sonorous invocation across the black waters. From the blacks huddled under the trees there came a shuddering response, like a wind wailing through midnight branches. Both invocation and response were framed in an unknown tongue–a guttural, primitive language.

Again he called out, this time a curious high-pitched wail. A shuddering sigh swept the black people. All eyes were fixed on the dusky water. And presently an object rose slowly from the depths. A sudden trembling shook me. It looked like the head of a negro. One after another it was followed by similar objects until five heads reared above the black, cypress-shadowed water. They might have been five negroes submerged except for their heads–but I knew this was not so. There was something diabolical here. Their silence, motionlessness, their whole aspect was unnatural. From the trees came the hysterical sobbing of women, and someone whimpered a man's name.

Then Saul Stark lifted his hands, and the five heads silently sank out of sight. Like a ghostly whisper I seemed to hear the voice of the African witch: "*He puts them in the swamp!* "

Stark's deep voice rolled out across the narrow water: "And now the Dance of the Skull, to make the conjer sure!"

What had the witch said? "*Hidden among the trees you shall watch the Dance of the Skull!* "

The drum struck up again, growling and rumbling. The blacks swayed on their haunches, lifting a wordless chant. Saul Stark paced measuredly about the figure on the sand, his arms weaving cryptic patterns. Then he wheeled and faced toward the other end of the glade. By some sleight of hand he now grasped a grinning human skull, and this he cast upon the wet sand beyond the body. "Bride of Damballah!" he thundered. "The sacrifice awaits!"

There was an expectant pause; the chanting sank. All eyes were glued on the farther end of the glade.

Stark stood waiting, and I saw him scowl as if puzzled. Then as he opened his mouth to repeat the call, a barbaric figure moved out of the shadows.

At the sight of her a chill shuddering shook me. For a moment she stood motionless, the firelight glinting on her gold ornaments, her head hanging on her breast. A tense silence reigned and I saw Saul Stark staring at her sharply. She seemed to be detached, somehow, standing aloof and withdrawn, head bent strangely.

Then, as if rousing herself, she began to sway with a jerky rhythm, and presently whirled into the mazes of a dance that was ancient when the ocean drowned the black kings of Atlantis. I cannot describe it. It was bestiality and diabolism set to motion, framed in a writhing, spinning whirl of posturing and gesturing that would have appalled a dancer of the Pharaohs. And that cursed skull danced with her; rattling and clashing on the sand, it bounded and spun like a live thing in time with her leaps and prancings.

But there was something amiss. I sensed it. Her arms hung limp, her drooping head swayed. Her legs bent and faltered, making her lurch drunkenly and out of time. A murmur rose from the people, and bewilderment etched Saul Stark's black countenance. For the domination of a conjure man is a thing hinged on a hair-trigger. Any trifling dislocation of formula or ritual may disrupt the whole web of his enchantment.

As for me, I felt the perspiration freeze on my flesh as I watched the grisly dance. The unseen shackles that bound me to that gyrating she-devil were strangling, crushing me. I knew she was approaching a climax, when she would summon me from my hiding-place, to wade through the black waters to the House of Damballah, to my doom.

Now she whirled to a floating stop, and when she halted, poised on her toes, she faced toward the spot where I lay hidden, and I knew that she could see me as plainly as if I stood in the open; knew, too, somehow, that only she knew of my presence. I felt myself toppling on the edge of the abyss. She raised her head and I saw the flame of her eyes, even at that distance. Her face was lit with awful triumph.

Slowly she raised her hand, and I felt my limbs begin to jerk in response to that terrible magnetism. She opened her mouth–

But from that open mouth sounded only a choking gurgle, and suddenly her lips were dyed crimson. And suddenly, without warning, her knees gave way and she pitched headlong into the sands.

And as she fell, so I too fell, sinking into the mire. Something burst in my brain with a shower of flame.

And then I was crouching among the trees, weak and trembling, but with such a sense of freedom and lightness of limb as I never dreamed a man could experience. The black spell that gripped me was broken; the foul incubus lifted from my soul. It was as if light had burst upon a night blacker than African midnight.

At the fall of the girl a wild cry arose from the blacks, and they sprang up, trembling on the verge of panic. I saw their rolling white eyeballs, their bared teeth glistening in the firelight. Saul Stark had worked their primitive natures up to a pitch of madness, meaning to turn this frenzy, at the proper time, into a fury of battle. It could as easily turn into an hysteria of terror. Stark shouted sharply at them.

But just then the girl in a last convulsion, rolled over on the wet sand, and the firelight shone on a round hole between her breasts, which still oozed crimson. Jim Braxton’s bullet had found its mark.

From the first I had felt that she was not wholly human; some black jungle spirit sired her, lending her the abysmal subhuman vitality that made her what she was. She had said that neither death nor hell could keep her from the Dance of the Skull. And, shot through the heart and dying, she had come through the swamp from the creek where she had received her death-wound to the House of Damballah. And the Dance of the Skull had been her death dance.

Dazed as a condemned man just granted a reprieve, at first I hardly grasped the meaning of the scene that now unfolded before me.

The blacks were in a frenzy. In the sudden, and to them inexplicable, death of the sorceress they saw a fearsome portent. They had no way of knowing that she was dying when she entered the glade. To them, their prophetess and priestess had been struck down under their very eyes, by an invisible death. This was magic blacker than Saul Stark's wizardry–and obviously hostile to them.

Like fear-maddened cattle they stampeded. Howling, screaming, tearing at one another they blundered through the trees, heading for the neck of land and the shore beyond. Saul Stark stood transfixed, heedless of them as he stared down at the brown girl, dead at last. And suddenly I came to myself, and with my awakened manhood came cold fury and the lust to kill. I drew a gun, and aiming in the uncertain firelight, pulled the trigger. Only a click answered me. The powder in the cap-and-ball pistols was wet.

Saul Stark lifted his head and licked his lips. The sounds of flight faded in the distance, and he stood alone in the glade. His eyes rolled whitely toward the black woods around him. He bent, grasped the man-like object that lay on the sand, and dragged it into the hut. The instant he vanished I started toward the island, wading through the narrow channels at the lower end. I had almost reached the shore when a mass of driftwood gave way with me and I slid into a deep hole.

Instantly the water swirled about me, and a head rose beside me; a dim face was close to mine–the face of a negro– *the face of Tunk Bixby.* But now it was inhuman; as expressionless and soulless as that of a catfish; the face of a being no longer human, and no longer mindful of its human origin.

Slimy, misshapen fingers gripped my throat, and I drove my knife into that sagging mouth. The features vanished in a wave of blood; mutely the thing sank out of sight, and I hauled myself up the bank, under the thick bushes.

Stark had run from his hut, a pistol in his hand. He was staring wildly about, alarmed by the noise he had heard, but I knew he could not see me. His ashy skin glistened with perspiration. He who had ruled by fear was now ruled by fear. He feared the unknown hand that had slain his mistress; feared the negroes who had fled from him; feared the abysmal swamp which had sheltered him, and the monstrosities he had created. He lifted a

weird call that quavered with panic. He called again as only four heads broke the water, but he called in vain.

But the four heads began to move toward the shore and the man who stood there. He shot them one after another. They made no effort to avoid the bullets. They came straight on, sinking one by one. He had fired six shots before the last head vanished. The shots drowned the sounds of my approach. I was close behind him when he turned at last.

I know he knew me; recognition flooded his face and fear went with it, at the knowledge that he had a human being to deal with. With a scream he hurled his empty pistol at me and rushed after it with a lifted knife.

I ducked, parried his lunge and countered with a thrust that bit deep into his ribs. He caught my wrist and I gripped his, and there we strained, breast to breast. His eyes were like a mad dog's in the starlight, his muscles like steel cords.

I ground my heel down on his bare foot, crushing the instep. He howled and lost balance, and I tore my knife hand free and stabbed him in the belly. Blood spurted and he dragged me down with him. I jerked loose and rose, just as he pulled himself up on his elbow and hurled his knife. It sang past my ear, and I stamped on his breast. His ribs caved in under my heel. In a red killing-haze I knelt, jerked back his head and cut his throat from ear to ear.

There was a pouch of dry powder in his belt. Before I moved further I reloaded my pistols. Then I went into the hut with a torch. And there I understood the doom the brown witch had meant for me. Tope Sorley lay moaning on a bunk. The transmutation that was to make him a mindless, soulless semi-human dweller in the water was not complete, but his mind was gone. Some of the physical changes had been made–by what godless sorcery out of Africa's black abyss I have no wish to know. His body was rounded and elongated, his legs dwarfed; his feet were flattened and broadened, his fingers horribly long, and *webbed*. His neck was inches longer than it should be. His features were not altered, but the expression was no more human than that of a great fish. And there, but for the loyalty

of Jim Braxton, lay Kirby Buckner. I placed my pistol muzzle against Tope's head in grim mercy and pulled the trigger.

And so the nightmare closed, and I would not drag out the grisly narration. The white people of Canaan never found anything on the island except the bodies of Saul Stark and the brown woman. They think to this day that a swamp negro killed Jim Braxton, after he had killed the brown woman, and that I broke up the threatened uprising by killing Saul Stark. I let them think it. They will never know the shapes the black water of Tularoosa hides. That is a secret I share with the cowed and terror-haunted black people of Goshen, and of it neither they nor I have ever spoken.

To a Woman

Though fathoms deep you sink me in the mould,

Locked in with thick-lapped lead and bolted wood,

Yet rest not easy in your lover's arms;

Let him beware to stand where I have stood.

I shall not fail to burst my ebon case,

And thrust aside the clods with fingers red:

Your blood shall turn to ice to see my face

Look from the shadows on your midnight bed.

To face the dead, *he*, too, shall wake in vain,

My fingers at his throat, your scream his knell;

He will not see me tear you from your bed,

And drag you buy your golden hair to Hell.

One Who Comes at Eventide

I think when I am old a furtive shape

OceanofPDF.com

Will sit beside me at my fireless hearth,

Dabbled with blood from stumps of severed wrists,

And flecked with blackened bits of mouldy earth.

My blood ran fire when the deed was done;

Now it runs colder than the moon that shone

On shattered fields where dead men lay in heaps

Who could not hear a ravished daughter’s moan.

(Dim through the bloody dawn on bitter winds

The throbbing of the distant guns was brought

When I reeled like a drunkard from the hut

That hid the horror my red hands had wrought.)

So now I fire my veins with stinging wine,

And hoard my youth as misers hug their gold,

Because I know what shape will come and sit

Beside my crumbling hearth–when I am old.

The Haunter of the Ring

As I entered John Kirowan’s study I was too much engrossed in my own thoughts to notice, at first, the haggard appearance of his visitor, a big, handsome young fellow well known to me.

“Hello, Kirowan,” I greeted. “Hello, Gordon. Haven’t seen you for quite a while. How’s Evelyn?” And before he could answer, still on the crest of the

enthusiasm which had brought me there, I exclaimed:

“Look here, you fellows, I’ve got something that will make you stare! I got it from that robber Ahmed Mektub, and I paid high for it, but it’s worth it. Look!” From under my coat I drew the jewel-hilted Afghan dagger which had fascinated me as a collector of rare weapons.

Kirowan, familiar with my passion, showed only polite interest, but the effect on Gordon was shocking.

With a strangled cry he sprang up and backward, knocking the chair clattering to the floor. Fists clenched and countenance livid he faced me, crying: “Keep back! Get away from me, or–”

I was frozen in my tracks.

“What in the–” I began bewilderedly, when Gordon, with another amazing change of attitude, dropped into a chair and sank his head in his hands. I saw his heavy shoulders quiver. I stared helplessly from him to Kirowan, who seemed equally dumfounded.

“Is he drunk?” I asked.

Kirowan shook his head, and filling a brandy glass, offered it to the man. Gordon looked up with haggard eyes, seized the drink and gulped it down like a man half famished. Then he straightened up and looked at us shamefacedly.

“I’m sorry I went off my handle, O’Donnel,” he said. “It was the unexpected shock of you drawing that knife.”

“Well,” I retorted, with some disgust, “I suppose you thought I was going to stab you with it!”

“Yes, I did!” Then, at the utterly blank expression on my face, he added: “Oh, I didn’t actually *think* that; at least, I didn’t reach that conclusion by any process of reasoning. It was just the blind primitive instinct of a hunted man, against whom anyone’s hand may be turned.”

His strange words and the despairing way he said them sent a queer shiver of nameless apprehension down my spine.

“What are you talking about?” I demanded uneasily. “Hunted? For what? You never committed a crime in your life.”

“Not in this life, perhaps,” he muttered.

“What do you mean?”

“What if retribution for a black crime committed in a previous life were hounding me?” he muttered.

“That’s nonsense,” I snorted.

“Oh, is it?” he exclaimed, stung. “Did you ever hear of my great-grandfather, Sir Richard Gordon of Argyle?”

“Sure; but what’s that got to do with–”

“You’ve seen his portrait: doesn’t it resemble me?”

“Well, yes,” I admitted, “except that your expression is frank and wholesome whereas his is crafty and cruel.”

“He murdered his wife,” answered Gordon. “Suppose the theory of reincarnation were true? Why shouldn’t a man suffer in one life for a crime committed in another?”

“You mean you think you are the reincarnation of your great-grandfather? Of all the fantastic–well, since he killed his wife, I suppose you’ll be expecting Evelyn to murder you!” This last was delivered in searing sarcasm, as I thought of the sweet, gentle girl Gordon had married. His answer stunned me.

“My wife,” he said slowly, “has tried to kill me three times in the past week.”

There was no reply to that. I glanced helplessly at John Kirowan. He sat in his customary position, chin resting on his strong, slim hands; his white face was immobile, but his dark eyes gleamed with interest. In the silence I heard a clock ticking like a death-watch.

“Tell us the full story, Gordon,” suggested Kirowan, and his calm, even voice was like a knife that cut a strangling, relieving the unreal tension.

“You know we’ve been married less than a year,” Gordon began, plunging into the tale as though he were bursting for utterance; his words stumbled and tripped over one another. “All couples have spats, of course, but we’ve never had any real quarrels. Evelyn is the best-natured girl in the world.

“The first thing out of the ordinary occurred about a week ago. We had driven up in the mountains, left the car, and were wandering around picking wild flowers. At last we came to a steep slope, some thirty feet in height, and Evelyn called my attention to the flowers which grew thickly at the foot. I was looking over the edge and wondering if I could climb down without tearing my clothes to ribbons, when I felt a violent shove from behind that toppled me over.

“If it had been a sheer cliff, I’d have broken my neck. As it was, I went tumbling down, rolling and sliding, and brought up at the bottom scratched and bruised, with my garments in rags. I looked up and saw Evelyn staring down, apparently frightened half out of her wits.

“‘Oh Jim!’ she cried. ‘Are you hurt? How came you to fall?’

“It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her that there was such a thing as carrying a joke too far, but these words checked me. I decided that she must have stumbled against me unintentionally, and actually didn’t know it was she who precipitated me down the slope.

“So I laughed it off, and went home. She made a great fuss over me, insisted on swabbing my scratches with iodine, and lectured me for my carelessness! I hadn’t the heart to tell her it was her fault.

“But four days later, the next thing happened. I was walking along our driveway, when I saw her coming up it in the automobile. I stepped out on the grass to let her by, as there isn’t any curb along the driveway. She was smiling as she approached me, and slowed down the car, as if to speak to me. Then, just before she reached me, a most horrible change came over her expression. Without warning the car leaped at me like a living thing as she drove her foot down on the accelerator. Only a frantic leap backward saved me from being ground under the wheels. The car shot across the lawn and crashed into a tree. I ran to it and found Evelyn dazed and hysterical, but unhurt. She babbled of losing control of the machine.

“I carried her into the house and sent for Doctor Donnelly. He found nothing seriously wrong with her, and attributed her dazed condition to fright and shock. Within half an hour she regained her normal senses, but she’s refused to touch the wheel since. Strange to say, she seemed less frightened on her own account than on mine. She seemed vaguely to know that she’d nearly run me down, and grew hysterical again when she spoke of it. Yet she seemed to take it for granted that I knew the machine had got out of her control. But I distinctly saw her wrench the wheel around, and I know she deliberately tried to hit me–why, God alone knows.

“Still I refused to let my mind follow the channel it was getting into. Evelyn had never given any evidence of any psychological weakness or ‘nerves’ she’s always been a level-headed girl, wholesome and natural. But I began to think she was subject to crazy impulses. Most of us have felt the impulse to leap from tall buildings. And sometimes a person feels a blind, childish and utterly reasonless urge to harm someone. We pick up a pistol, and the thought suddenly enters our mind how easy it would be to send our friend, who sits smiling and unaware, into eternity with a touch of the trigger. Of course we don’t do it, but the impulse is there. So I thought perhaps some lack of mental discipline made Evelyn susceptible to these unguided impulses, and unable to control them.”

“Nonsense,” I broke in. “I’ve known her since she was a baby. If she has any such trait, she’s developed it since she married you.”

It was an unfortunate remark. Gordon caught it up with a despairing gleam in his eyes. “That’s just it–since she married me! It’s a curse–a black,

ghastly curse, crawling like a serpent out of the past! I tell you, I was Richard Gordon and she–she was Lady Elizabeth, his murdered wife!" His voice sank to a blood-freezing whisper.

I shuddered; it is an awful thing to look upon the ruin of a keen clean brain, and such I was certain that I surveyed in James Gordon. Why or how, or by what grisly chance it had come about I could not say, but I was certain the man was mad.

"You spoke of three attempts." It was John Kirowan's voice again, calm and stable amid the gathering webs of horror and unreality.

"Look here!" Gordon lifted his arm, drew back the sleeve and displayed a bandage, the cryptic significance of which was intolerable.

"I came into the bathroom this morning looking for my razor," he said. "I found Evelyn just on the point of using my best shaving implement for some feminine purpose–to cut out a pattern, or something. Like many women she can't seem to realize the difference between a razor and a butcher-knife or a pair of shears.

"I was a bit irritated, and I said: 'Evelyn, how many times have I told you not to use my razors for such things? Bring it here; I'll give you my pocket-knife.'

"'I'm sorry, Jim,' she said. 'I didn't know it would hurt the razor. Here it is.'

"She was advancing, holding the open razor toward me. I reached for it–then something warned me. It was the same look in her eyes, just as I had seen it the day she nearly ran over me. That was all that saved my life, for I instinctively threw up my hand just as she slashed at my throat with all her power. The blade gashed my arm as you see, before I caught her wrist. For an instant she fought me like a wild thing; her slender body was taut as steel beneath my hands. Then she went limp and the look in her eyes was replaced by a strange dazed expression. The razor slipped out of her fingers.

"I let go of her and she stood swaying as if about to faint. I went to the lavatory–my wound was bleeding in a beastly fashion–and the next thing I

heard her cry out, and she was hovering over me.

"'Jim!' she cried. 'How did you cut yourself so terribly?'"

Gordon shook his head and sighed heavily. "I guess I was a bit out of my head. My self-control snapped.

"'Don't keep up this pretense, Evelyn,' I said. 'God knows what's got into you, but you know as well as I that you've tried to kill me three times in the past week.'

"She recoiled as if I'd struck her, catching at her breast and staring at me as if at a ghost. She didn't say a word–and just what I said I don't remember. But when I finished I left her standing there white and still as a marble statue. I got my arm bandaged at a drug store, and then came over here, not knowing what else to do.

"Kirowan–O'Donnel–it's damnable! Either my wife is subject to fits of insanity–" He choked on the word. "No, I can't believe it. Ordinarily her eyes are too clear and level–too utterly sane. But every time she has an opportunity to harm me, she seems to become a temporary maniac."

He beat his fists together in his impotence and agony.

"But it isn't insanity! I used to work in a psychopathic ward, and I've seen every form of mental unbalance. My wife is *not* insane!"

"Then what–" I began, but he turned haggard eyes on me.

"Only one alternative remains," he answered. "It is the old curse–from the days when I walked the earth with a heart as black as hell's darkest pits, and did evil in the sight of man and of God. *She* knows, in fleeting snatches of memory. People have *seen* before–have glimpsed forbidden things in momentary liftings of the veil which bars life from life. She was Elizabeth Douglas, the ill-fated bride of Richard Gordon, whom he murdered in jealous frenzy, and the vengeance is hers. I shall die by her hands, as it was meant to be. And she–" he bowed his head in his hands.

“Just a moment.” It was Kirowan again. “You have mentioned a strange look in your wife’s eyes. What sort of a look? Was it of maniacal frenzy?”

Gordon shook his head. “It was an utter blankness. All the life and intelligence simply vanished, leaving her eyes dark wells of emptiness.”

Kirowan nodded, and asked a seemingly irrelevant question. “Have you any enemies?”

“Not that I know of.”

“You forget Joseph Roelocke,” I said. “I can’t imagine that elegant sophisticate going to the trouble of doing you actual harm, but I have an idea that if he could discomfort you without any physical effort on his part, he’d do it with a right good will.”

Kirowan turned on me an eye that had suddenly become piercing.

“And who is this Joseph Roelocke?”

“A young exquisite who came into Evelyn’s life and nearly rushed her off her feet for a while. But in the end she came back to her first love–Gordon here. Roelocke took it pretty hard. For all his suaveness there’s a streak of violence and passion in the man that might have cropped out but for his infernal indolence and blasé indifference.”

“Oh, there’s nothing to be said against Roelocke,” interrupted Gordon impatiently. “He must know that Evelyn never really loved him. He merely fascinated her temporarily with his romantic Latin air.”

“Not exactly Latin, Jim,” I protested. “Roelocke does look foreign, but it isn’t Latin. It’s almost Oriental.”

“Well, what has Roelocke to do with this matter?” Gordon snarled with the irascibility of frayed nerves.

“He’s been as friendly as a man could be since Evelyn and I were married. In fact, only a week ago he sent her a ring which he said was a peace-

offering and a belated wedding gift; said that after all, her jilting him was a greater misfortune for her than it was for him–the conceited jackass!"

"A ring?" Kirowan had suddenly come to life; it was as if something hard and steely had been sounded in him. "What sort of a ring?"

"Oh, a fantastic thing–copper, made like a scaly snake coiled three times, with its tail in its mouth and yellow jewels for eyes. I gather he picked it up somewhere in Hungary."

"He has traveled a great deal in Hungary?"

Gordon looked surprized at this questioning, but answered: "Why, apparently the man's traveled everywhere. I put him down as the pampered son of a millionaire. He never did any work, so far as I know."

"He's a great student," I put in. "I've been up to his apartment several times, and I never saw such a collection of books–"

Gordon leaped to his feet with an oath. "Are we all crazy?" he cried. "I came up here hoping to get some help–and you fellows fall to talking of Joseph Roelocke. I'll go to Doctor Donnelly–"

"Wait!" Kirowan stretched out a detaining hand. "If you don't mind, we'll go over to your house. I'd like to talk to your wife."

Gordon dumbly acquiesced. Harried and haunted by grisly forebodings, he knew not which way to turn, and welcomed anything that promised aid.

We drove over in his car, and scarcely a word was spoken on the way. Gordon was sunk in moody ruminations, and Kirowan had withdrawn himself into some strange aloof domain of thought beyond my ken. He sat like a statue, his dark vital eyes staring into space, not blankly, but as one who looks with understanding into some far realm.

Though I counted the man as my best friend, I knew but little of his past. He had come into my life as abruptly and unannounced as Joseph Roelocke had come into the life of Evelyn Ash. I had met him at the Wanderer's Club,

which is composed of the drift of the world, travelers, eccentrics, and all manner of men whose paths lie outside the beaten tracks of life. I had been attracted to him, and intrigued by his strange powers and deep knowledge. I vaguely knew that he was the black sheep younger son of a titled Irish family, and that he had walked many strange ways. Gordon's mention of Hungary struck a chord in my memory; one phase of his life Kirowan had once let drop, fragmentarily. I only knew that he had once suffered a bitter grief and a savage wrong, and that it had been in Hungary. But the nature of the episode I did not know.

At Gordon's house Evelyn met us calmly, showing inner agitation only by the over-restraint of her manner. I saw the beseeching look she stole at her husband. She was a slender, soft-spoken girl, whose dark eyes were always vibrant and alight with emotion. That child try to murder her adored husband?

The idea was monstrous. Again I was convinced that James Gordon himself was deranged.

Following Kirowan's lead, we made a pretense of small talk, as if we had casually dropped in, but I felt that Evelyn was not deceived. Our conversation rang false and hollow, and presently Kirowan said:

"Mrs. Gordon, that is a remarkable ring you are wearing. Do you mind if I look at it?"

"I'll have to give you my hand," she laughed. "I've been trying to get it off today, and it won't come off."

She held out her slim white hand for Kirowan's inspection, and his face was immobile as he looked at the metal snake that coiled about her slim finger. He did not touch it. I myself was aware of an unaccountable repulsion. There was something almost obscene about that dull copperish reptile wound about the girl's white finger.

"It's evil-looking, isn't it?" She involuntarily shivered. "At first I liked it, but now I can hardly bear to look at it. If I can get it off I intend to return it to Joseph–Mr. Roelocke."

Kirowan was about to make some reply, when the door-bell rang. Gordon jumped as if shot, and Evelyn rose quickly.

“I’ll answer it, Jim–I know who it is.”

She returned an instant later with two more mutual friends, those inseparable cronies, Doctor Donnelly, whose burly body, jovial manner and booming voice were combined with as keen a brain as any in the profession, and Bill Bain, elderly, lean, wiry, acidly witty. Both were old friends of the Ash family. Doctor Donnelly had ushered Evelyn into the world, and Bain was always Uncle Bill to her.

“Howdy, Jim! Howdy, Mr. Kirowan!” roared Donnelly. “Hey, O’Donnel, have you got any firearms with you? Last time you nearly blew my head off showing me an old flintlock pistol that wasn’t supposed to be loaded–”

“Doctor Donnelly!”

We all turned. Evelyn was standing beside a wide table, holding it as if for support. Her face was white.

Our badinage ceased instantly. A sudden tension was in the air.

“Doctor Donnelly,” she repeated, holding her voice steady by an effort, “I sent for you and Uncle Bill–for the same reason for which I know Jim has brought Mr. Kirowan and Michael. There is a matter Jim and I can no longer deal with alone. There is something between us–something black and ghastly and terrible.”

“What are you talking about, girl?” All the levity was gone from Donnelly’s great voice.

“My husband–” She choked, then went blindly on: “My husband has accused me of trying to murder him.”

The silence that fell was broken by Bain’s sudden and energetic rise. His eyes blazed and his fists quivered.

“You young pup!” he shouted at Gordon. “I’ll knock the living daylights–”

“Sit down, Bill!” Donnelly’s huge hand crushed his smaller companion back into his chair. “No use goin’

off half cocked. Go ahead, honey.”

“We need help. We can not carry this thing alone.” A shadow crossed her comely face. “This morning Jim’s arm was badly cut. He said I did it. I don’t know. I was handing him the razor. Then I must have fainted. At least, everything faded away. When I came to myself he was washing his arm in the lavatory–and–and he accused me of trying to kill him.”

“Why, the young fool!” barked the belligerent Bain. “Hasn’t he sense enough to know that if you did cut him, it was an accident?”

“Shut up, won’t you?” snorted Donnelly. “Honey, did you say you fainted? That isn’t like you.”

“I’ve been having fainting spells,” she answered. “The first time was when we were in the mountains and Jim fell down a cliff. We were standing on the edge–then everything went black, and when my sight cleared, he was rolling down the slope.” She shuddered at the recollection.

“Then when I lost control of the car and it crashed into the tree. You remember–Jim called you over.”

Doctor Donnelly nodded his head ponderously.

“I don’t remember you ever having fainting spells before.”

“But Jim says I pushed him over the cliff!” she cried hysterically. “He says I tried to run him down in the car! He says I purposely slashed him with the razor!”

Doctor Donnelly turned perplexedly toward the wretched Gordon.

“How about it, son?”

“God help me,” Gordon burst out in agony; “it’s true!”

“Why, you lying hound!” It was Bain who gave tongue, leaping again to his feet. “If you want a divorce, why don’t you get it in a decent way, instead of resorting to these despicable tactics–”

“Damn you!” roared Gordon, lunging up, and losing control of himself completely. “If you say that I’ll tear your jugular out!”

Evelyn screamed; Donnelly grabbed Bain ponderously and banged him back into his chair with no overly gentle touch, and Kirowan laid a hand lightly on Gordon’s shoulder. The man seemed to crumple into himself. He sank back into his chair and held out his hands gropingly toward his wife.

“Evelyn,” he said, his voice thick with laboring emotion, “you know I love you. I feel like a dog. But God help me, it’s true. If we go on this way, I’ll be a dead man, and you–”

“Don’t say it!” she screamed. “I know you wouldn’t lie to me, Jim. If you say I tried to kill you, I know I did. But I swear, Jim, I didn’t do it consciously. Oh, I must be going mad! That’s why my dreams have been so wild and terrifying lately–”

“Of what have you dreamed, Mrs. Gordon?” asked Kirowan gently.

She pressed her hands to her temples and stared dully at him, as if only half comprehending.

“A black thing,” she muttered. “A horrible faceless black thing that mows and mumbles and paws over me with apish hands. I dream of it every night. And in the daytime I try to kill the only man I ever loved.

I’m going mad! Maybe I’m already crazy and don’t know it.”

“Calm yourself, honey.” To Doctor Donnelly, with all his science, it was only another case of feminine hysteria. His matter-of-fact voice seemed to soothe her, and she sighed and drew a weary hand through her damp locks.

“We’ll talk this all over, and everything’s goin’ to be okay,” he said, drawing a thick cigar from his vest pocket. “Gimme a match, honey.”

She began mechanically to feel about the table, and just as mechanically Gordon said: “There are matches in the drawer, Evelyn.”

She opened the drawer and began groping in it, when suddenly, as if struck by recollection and intuition, Gordon sprang up, white-faced, and shouted: “No, no! Don’t open that drawer–don’t–”

Even as he voiced that urgent cry, she stiffened, as if at the feel of something in the drawer. Her change of expression held us all frozen, even Kirowan. The vital intelligence vanished from her eyes like a blown-out flame, and into them came the look Gordon had described as blank. The term was descriptive. Her beautiful eyes were dark wells of emptiness, as if the soul had been withdrawn from behind them.

Her hand came out of the drawer holding a pistol, and she fired point-blank. Gordon reeled with a groan and went down, blood starting from his head. For a flashing instant she looked down stupidly at the smoking gun in her hand, like one suddenly waking from a nightmare. Then her wild scream of agony smote our ears.

“Oh God, I’ve killed him! Jim! *Jim!* ”

She reached him before any of us, throwing herself on her knees and cradling his bloody head in her arms, while she sobbed in an unbearable passion of horror and anguish. The emptiness was gone from her eyes; they were alive and dilated with grief and terror.

I was making toward my prostrate friend with Donnelly and Bain, but Kirowan caught my arm. His face was no longer immobile; his eyes glittered with a controlled savagery.

“Leave him to them!” he snarled. “We are hunters, not healers! Lead me to the house of Joseph Roelocke!”

I did not question him. We drove there in Gordon’s car. I had the wheel, and something about the grim face of my companion caused me to hurl the machine recklessly through the traffic. I had the sensation of being part of a

tragic drama which was hurtling with headlong speed toward a terrible climax.

I wrenched the car to a grinding halt at the curb before the building where Roelocke lived in a bizarre apartment high above the city. The very elevator that shot us skyward seemed imbued with something of Kirowan's driving urge for haste. I pointed out Roelocke's door, and he cast it open without knocking and shouldered his way in. I was close at his heels.

Roelocke, in a dressing-gown of Chinese silk worked with dragons, was lounging on a divan, puffing quickly at a cigarette. He sat up, overturning a wine-glass which stood with a half-filled bottle at his elbow.

Before Kirowan could speak, I burst out with our news. "James Gordon has been shot!"

He sprang to his feet. "Shot? When? When did she kill him?"

"*She?* " I glared in bewilderment. "How did you know–"

With a steely hand Kirowan thrust me aside, and as the men faced each other, I saw recognition flare up in Roelocke's face. They made a strong contrast: Kirowan, tall, pale with some white-hot passion; Roelocke, slim, darkly handsome, with the saracenic arch of his slim brows above his black eyes. I realized that whatever else occurred, it lay between those two men. They were not strangers; I could sense like a tangible thing the hate that lay between them.

"John Kirowan!" softly whispered Roelocke.

"You remember me, Yosef Vrolok!" Only an iron control kept Kirowan's voice steady. The other merely stared at him without speaking.

"Years ago," said Kirowan more deliberately, "when we delved in the dark mysteries together in Budapest, I saw whither you were drifting. I drew back; I would not descend to the foul depths of forbidden occultism and diabolism to which you sank. And because I would not, you despised me, and you robbed me of the only woman I ever loved; you turned her against

me by means of your vile arts, and then you degraded and debauched her, sank her into your own foul slime. I had killed you with my hands then, Yosef Vrolok–vampire by nature as well as by name that you are–but your arts protected you from physical vengeance. But you have trapped yourself at last!"

Kirowan's voice rose in fierce exultation. All his cultured restraint had been swept away from him, leaving a primitive, elemental man, raging and gloating over a hated foe.

"You sought the destruction of James Gordon and his wife, because she unwittingly escaped your snare; you–"

Roelocke shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "You are mad. I have not seen the Gordons for weeks.

Why blame me for their family troubles?"

Kirowan snarled. "Liar as always. What did you say just now when O'Donnel told you Gordon had been shot? 'When did *she* kill him?' You were expecting to hear that the girl had killed her husband.

Your psychic powers had told you that a climax was close at hand. You were nervously awaiting news of the success of your devilish scheme.

"But I did not need a slip of your tongue to recognize your handiwork. I knew as soon as I saw the ring on Evelyn Gordon's finger; the ring she could not remove; the ancient and accursed ring of Thoth-amon, handed down by foul cults of sorcerers since the days of forgotten Stygia. I knew that ring was yours, and I knew by what ghastly rites you came to possess it. And I knew its power. Once she put it on her finger, in her innocence and ignorance, she was in your power. By your black magic you summoned the black elemental spirit, *the haunter of the ring*, out of the gulfs of Night and the ages. Here in your accursed chamber you performed unspeakable rituals to drive Evelyn Gordon's soul from her body, and to cause that body to be possessed by that godless sprite from *outside* the human universe.

“She was too clean and wholesome, her love for her husband too strong, for the fiend to gain complete and permanent possession of her body; only for brief instants could it drive her own spirit into the void and animate her form. But that was enough for your purpose. But you have brought ruin upon yourself by your vengeance!”

Kirowan’s voice rose to a feline screech.

“What was the price demanded by the fiend you drew from the Pits? Ha, you blench! Yosef Vrolok is not the only man to have learned forbidden secrets! After I left Hungary, a broken man, I took up again the study of the black arts, to trap you, you cringing serpent! I explored the ruins of Zimbabwe, the lost mountains of inner Mongolia, and the forgotten jungle islands of the southern seas. I learned what sickened my soul so that I forswore occultism for ever–but I learned of the black spirit that deals death by the hand of a beloved one, and is controlled by a master of magic.

“But, Yosef Vrolok, you are not an adept! You have not the power to control the fiend you have invoked. And you have sold your soul!”

The Hungarian tore at his collar as if it were a strangling noose. His face had changed, as if a mask had dropped away; he looked much older.

“You lie!” he panted. “I did not promise him *my* soul–”

“I do not lie!” Kirowan’s shriek was shocking in its wild exultation. “I know the price a man must pay for calling forth the nameless shape that roams the gulfs of Darkness. Look! There in the corner behind you!

A nameless, sightless thing is laughing–is mocking you! It has fulfilled its bargain, and it has come for you, Yosef Vrolok!”

“No!” shrieked Vrolok, tearing his limp collar away from his sweating throat. His composure had crumpled, and his demoralization was sickening to see. “I tell you it was not *my* soul–I promised it a soul, but not *my* soul–he must take the soul of the girl, or of James Gordon–”

“Fool!” roared Kirowan. “Do you think *he* could take the souls of innocence? That he would not know they were beyond his reach? The girl and the youth he could kill; their souls were not his to take or yours to give. But *your* black soul is not beyond his reach, and he will have his wage. *Look!* He is materializing behind you! He is growing out of thin air!”

Was it the hypnosis inspired by Kirowan’s burning words that caused me to shudder and grow cold, to feel an icy chill that was not of earth pervade the room? Was it a trick of light and shadow that seemed to produce the effect of a black anthropomorphic shadow on the wall behind the Hungarian? *No*, by heaven! It grew, it swelled–Vrolok had not turned. He stared at Kirowan with eyes starting from his head, hair standing stiffly on his scalp, sweat dripping from his livid face.

Kirowan’s cry started shudders down my spine.

“Look behind you, fool! *I see him!* He has come! He is here! His grisly mouth gapes in awful laughter!

His misshapen paws reach for you!”

And then at last Vrolok wheeled, with an awful shriek, throwing his arms above his head in a gesture of wild despair. And for one brain-shattering instant he was *blotted out* by a great black shadow–Kirowan grasped my arm and we fled from that accursed chamber, blind with horror.

The same paper which bore a brief item telling of James Gordon having suffered a slight scalp-wound by the accidental discharge of a pistol in his home, headlined the sudden death of Joseph Roelocke, wealthy and eccentric clubman, in his sumptuous apartments–apparently from heart-failure.

I read it at breakfast, while I drank cup after cup of black coffee, from a hand that was not too steady, even after the lapse of a night. Across the table from me Kirowan likewise seemed to lack appetite. He brooded, as if he roamed again through bygone years.

“Gordon’s fantastic theory of reincarnation was wild enough,” I said at last. “But the actual facts were still more incredible. Tell me, Kirowan, was that last scene the result of hypnosis? Was it the power of your words that made me seem to see a black horror grow out of the air and rip Yosef Vrolok’s soul from his living body?”

He shook his head. “No human hypnotism would strike that black-hearted devil dead on the floor. No; there are beings outside the ken of common humanity, foul shapes of transcosmic evil. Such a one it was with which Vrolok dealt.”

“But how could it claim his soul?” I persisted. “If indeed such an awful bargain had been struck, it had not fulfilled its part, for James Gordon was not dead, but merely knocked senseless.”

“Vrolok did not know it,” answered Kirowan. “He thought that Gordon was dead, and I convinced him that he himself had been trapped, and was doomed. In his demoralization he fell easy prey to the thing he called forth. *It*, of course, was always watching for a moment of weakness on his part. The powers of Darkness never deal fairly with human beings; he who traffics with them is always cheated in the end.”

“It’s a mad nightmare,” I muttered. “But it seems to me, then, that you as much as anything else brought about Vrolok’s death.”

“It is gratifying to think so,” Kirowan answered. “Evelyn Gordon is safe now; and it is a small repayment for what he did to another girl, years ago, and in a far country.”

Pigeons from Hell

I

THE WHISTLER IN THE DARK

Griswell awoke suddenly, every nerve tingling with a premonition of imminent peril. He stared about wildly, unable at first to remember where he was, or what he was doing there. Moonlight filtered in through the dusty

windows, and the great empty room with its lofty ceiling and gaping black fireplace was spectral and unfamiliar. Then as he emerged from the clinging cobwebs of his recent sleep, he remembered where he was and how he came to be there. He twisted his head and stared at his companion, sleeping on the floor near him. John Branner was but a vaguely bulking shape in the darkness that the moon scarcely grayed.

Griswell tried to remember what had awakened him. There was no sound in the house, no sound outside except the mournful hoot of an owl, far away in the piny woods. Now he had captured the illusive memory. It was a dream, a nightmare so filled with dim terror that it had frightened him awake.

Recollection flooded back, vividly etching the abominable vision.

Or was it a dream? Certainly it must have been, but it had blended so curiously with recent actual events that it was difficult to know where reality left off and fantasy began.

Dreaming, he had seemed to relive his past few waking hours, in accurate detail. The dream had begun, abruptly, as he and John Branner came in sight of the house where they now lay. They had come rattling and bouncing over the stumpy, uneven old road that led through the pinelands, he and John Branner, wandering far afield from their New England home, in search of vacation pleasure. They had sighted the old house with its balustraded galleries rising amidst a wilderness of weeds and bushes, just as the sun was setting behind it. It dominated their fancy, rearing black and stark and gaunt against the low lurid rampart of sunset, barred by the black pines.

They were tired, sick of bumping and pounding all day over woodland roads. The old deserted house stimulated their imagination with its suggestion of antebellum splendor and ultimate decay. They left the automobile beside the rutty road, and as they went up the winding walk of crumbling bricks, almost lost in the tangle of rank growth, pigeons rose from the balustrades in a fluttering, feathery crowd and swept away with a low thunder of beating wings.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Dust lay thick on the floor of the wide, dim hallway, on the broad steps of the stair that mounted up from the hall. They turned into a door opposite the landing, and entered a large room, empty, dusty, with cobwebs shining thickly in the corners. Dust lay thick over the ashes in the great fireplace.

They discussed gathering wood and building a fire, but decided against it. As the sun sank, darkness came quickly, the thick, black, absolute darkness of the pinelands. They knew that rattlesnakes and copperheads haunted Southern forests, and they did not care to go groping for firewood in the dark.

They ate frugally from tins, then rolled in their blankets fully clad before the empty fireplace, and went instantly to sleep.

This, in part, was what Griswell had dreamed. He saw again the gaunt house looming stark against the crimson sunset; saw the flight of the pigeons as he and Branner came up the shattered walk. He saw the dim room in which they presently lay, and he saw the two forms that were himself and his companion, lying wrapped in their blankets on the dusty floor. Then from that point his dream altered subtly, passed out of the realm of the commonplace and became tinged with fear. He was looking into a vague, shadowy chamber, lit by the gray light of the moon which streamed in from some obscure source. For there was no window in that room. But in the gray light he saw three silent shapes that hung suspended in a row, and their stillness and their outlines woke chill horror in his soul. There was no sound, no word, but he sensed a Presence of fear and lunacy crouching in a dark corner…. Abruptly he was back in the dusty, high-ceilinged room, before the great fireplace.

He was lying in his blankets, staring tensely through the dim door and across the shadowy hall, to where a beam of moonlight fell across the balustraded stair, some seven steps up from the landing. And there was something on the stair, a bent, misshapen, shadowy thing that never moved fully into the beam of light. But a dim yellow blur that might have been a face was turned toward him, as if *something* crouched on the stair, regarding him and his companion. Fright crept chilly through his veins, and it was then that he awoke–if indeed he had been asleep.

He blinked his eyes. The beam of moonlight fell across the stair just as he had dreamed it did; but no figure lurked there. Yet his flesh still crawled from the fear the dream or vision had roused in him; his legs felt as if they had been plunged in ice-water. He made an involuntary movement to awaken his companion, when a sudden sound paralyzed him.

It was the sound of whistling on the floor above. Eery and sweet it rose, not carrying any tune, but piping shrill and melodious. Such a sound in a supposedly deserted house was alarming enough; but it was more than the fear of a physical invader that held Griswell frozen. He could not himself have defined the horror that gripped him. But Branner's blankets rustled, and Griswell saw he was sitting upright. His figure bulked dimly in the soft darkness, the head turned toward the stair as if the man were listening intently.

More sweetly and more subtly evil rose that weird whistling.

"John!" whispered Griswell from dry lips. He had meant to shout–to tell Branner that there was somebody upstairs, somebody who could mean them no good; that they must leave the house at once.

But his voice died dryly in his throat.

Branner had risen. His boots clumped on the floor as he moved toward the door. He stalked leisurely into the hall and made for the lower landing, merging with the shadows that clustered black about the stair.

Griswell lay incapable of movement, his mind a whirl of bewilderment. Who was that whistling upstairs?

Why was Branner going up the stairs? Griswell saw him pass the spot where the moonlight rested, saw his head tilted back as if he were looking at something Griswell could not see, above and beyond the stair. But his face was like that of a sleepwalker. He moved across the bar of moonlight and vanished from Griswell's view, even as the latter tried to shout to him to come back. A ghastly whisper was the only result of his effort.

The whistling sank to a lower note, died out. Griswell heard the stairs creaking under Branner's measured tread. Now he had reached the hallway above, for Griswell heard the clump of his feet moving along it. Suddenly the footfalls halted, and the whole night seemed to hold its breath. Then an awful scream split the stillness, and Griswell started up, echoing the cry.

The strange paralysis that had held him was broken. He took a step toward the door, then checked himself. The footfalls were resumed. Branner was coming back. He was not running. The tread was even more deliberate and measured than before. Now the stairs began to creak again. A groping hand, moving along the balustrade, came into the bar of moonlight; then another, and a ghastly thrill went through Griswell as he saw that the other hand gripped a hatchet–a hatchet which dripped blackly. *Was* that Branner who was coming down that stair?

Yes! The figure had moved into the bar of moonlight now, and Griswell recognized it. Then he saw Branner's face, and a shriek burst from Griswell's lips. Branner's face was bloodless, corpse-like; gouts of blood dripped darkly down it; his eyes were glassy and set, and blood oozed from the great gash *which cleft the crown of his head!*

Griswell never remembered exactly how he got out of that accursed house. Afterward he retained a mad, confused impression of smashing his way through a dusty cobwebbed window, of stumbling blindly across the weed-choked lawn, gibbering his frantic horror. He saw the black wall of the pines, and the moon floating in a blood-red mist in which there was neither sanity nor reason.

Some shred of sanity returned to him as he saw the automobile beside the road. In a world gone suddenly mad, that was an object reflecting prosaic reality; but even as he reached for the door, a dry chilling whir sounded in his ears, and he recoiled from the swaying undulating shape that arched up from its scaly coils on the driver's seat and hissed sibilantly at him, darting a forked tongue in the moonlight.

With a sob of horror he turned and fled down the road, as a man runs in a nightmare. He ran without purpose or reason. His numbed brain was

incapable of conscious thought. He merely obeyed the blind primitive urge to run–run–run until he fell exhausted.

The black walls of the pines flowed endlessly past him; so he was seized with the illusion that he was getting nowhere. But presently a sound penetrated the fog of his terror–the steady, inexorable patter of feet behind him. Turning his head, he saw *something* loping after him–wolf or dog, he could not tell which, but its eyes glowed like balls of green fire. With a gasp he increased his speed, reeled around a bend in the road, and heard a horse snort; saw it rear and heard its rider curse; saw the gleam of blue steel in the man's lifted hand.

He staggered and fell, catching at the rider's stirrup.

"For God's sake, help me!" he panted. "The thing! It killed Branner–it's coming after me! *Look!* "

Twin balls of fire gleamed in the fringe of bushes at the turn of the road. The rider swore again, and on the heels of his profanity came the smashing report of his six-shooter–again and yet again. The fire-sparks vanished, and the rider, jerking his stirrup free from Griswell's grasp, spurred his horse at the bend.

Griswell staggered up, shaking in every limb. The rider was out of sight only a moment; then he came galloping back.

"Took to the brush. Timber wolf, I reckon, though I never heard of one chasin' a man before. Do you know what it was?"

Griswell could only shake his head weakly.

The rider, etched in the moonlight, looked down at him, smoking pistol still lifted in his right hand. He was a compactly-built man of medium height, and his broad-brimmed planter's hat and his boots marked him as a native of the country as definitely as Griswell's garb stamped him as a stranger.

"What's all this about, anyway?"

“I don’t know,” Griswell answered helplessly. “My name’s Griswell. John Branner–my friend who was travelling with me–we stopped at a deserted house back down the road to spend the night. Something–”

at the memory he was choked by a rush of horror. “My God!” he screamed. “I must be mad!

Something came and looked over the balustrade of the stair–something with a yellow face! I thought I dreamed it, but it must have been real. Then somebody began whistling upstairs, and Branner rose and went up the stairs walking like a man in his sleep, or hypnotized. I heard him scream–or someone screamed; then he came down the stair again with a bloody hatchet in his hand–and my God, sir, he was *dead*! His head had been split open. I saw brains and clotted blood oozing down his face, and his face was that of a dead man. *But he came down the stair!* As God is my witness, John Branner was murdered in that dark upper hallway, and then his dead body came stalking down the stairs with a hatchet in its hand–to kill me!”

The rider made no reply; he sat his horse like a statue, outlined against the stars, and Griswell could not read his expression, his face shadowed by his hat-brim.

“You think I’m mad,” he said hopelessly. “Perhaps I am.”

“I don’t know what to think,” answered the rider. “If it was any house but the old Blassenville Manor–well, we’ll see. My name’s Buckner. I’m sheriff of this county. Took a nigger over to the county seat in the next county and was ridin’ back late.”

He swung off his horse and stood beside Griswell, shorter than the lanky New Englander, but much harder knit. There was a natural manner of decision and certainty about him, and it was easy to believe that he would be a dangerous man in any sort of a fight.

“Are you afraid to go back to the house?” he asked, and Griswell shuddered, but shook his head, the dogged tenacity of Puritan ancestors asserting itself.

“The thought of facing that horror again turns me sick. But poor Branner–” he choked again. “We must find his body. My God!” he cried, unmanned by the abysmal horror of the thing; “*what* will we find? If a dead man walks, what–”

“We’ll see.” The sheriff caught the reins in the crook of his left elbow and began filling the empty chambers of his big blue pistol as they walked along.

As they made the turn Griswell’s blood was ice at the thought of what they might see lumbering up the road with bloody, grinning death-mask, but they saw only the house looming spectrally among the pines, down the road. A strong shudder shook Griswell.

“God, how *evil* that house looks, against those black pines! It looked sinister from the very first–when we went up the broken walk and saw those pigeons fly up from the porch–”

“Pigeons?” Buckner cast him a quick glance. “You saw the pigeons?”

“Why, yes! Scores of them perching on the porch railing.”

They strode on for a moment in silence, before Buckner said abruptly: “I’ve lived in this country all my life. I’ve passed the old Blassenville place a thousand times, I reckon, at all hours of the day and night.

But I never saw a pigeon anywhere around it, or anywhere else in these woods.”

“There were scores of them,” repeated Griswell, bewildered.

“I’ve seen men who swore they’d seen a flock of pigeons perched along the balusters just at sundown,”

said Buckner slowly. “Niggers, all of them except one man. A tramp. He was buildin’ a fire in the yard, aimin’ to camp there that night. I passed along there about dark, and he told me about the pigeons. I came back by there the next mornin’. The ashes of his fire were there, and his tin cup, and

skillet where he'd fried pork, and his blankets looked like they'd been slept in. Nobody ever saw him again. That was twelve years ago. The niggers say they can see the pigeons, but no nigger would pass along this road between sundown and sun-up. They say the pigeons are the souls of the Blassenvilles, let out of hell at sunset. The niggers say the red glare in the west is the light from hell, because then the gates of hell are open, and the Blassenvilles fly out."

"Who were the Blassenvilles?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"They owned all this land here. French-English family. Came here from the West Indies before the Louisiana Purchase. The Civil War ruined them, like it did so many. Some were killed in the War; most of the others died out. Nobody's lived in the Manor since 1890 when Miss Elizabeth Blassenville, the last of the line, fled from the old house one night like it was a plague spot, and never came back to it–this your auto?"

They halted beside the car, and Griswell stared morbidly at the grim house. Its dusty panes were empty and blank; but they did not seem blind to him. It seemed to him that ghastly eyes were fixed hungrily on him through those darkened panes. Buckner repeated his question.

"Yes. Be careful. There's a snake on the seat–or there was."

"Not there now," grunted Buckner, tying his horse and pulling an electric torch out of the saddle-bag.

"Well, let's have a look."

He strode up the broken brick-walk as matter-of-factly as if he were paying a social call on friends.

Griswell followed close at his heels, his heart pounding suffocatingly. A scent of decay and moldering vegetation blew on the faint wind, and Griswell grew faint with nausea, that rose from a frantic abhorrence of these black woods, these ancient plantation houses that hid forgotten secrets of slavery and bloody pride and mysterious intrigues. He had thought of the South as a sunny, lazy land washed by soft breezes laden with spice and

warm blossoms, where life ran tranquilly to the rhythm of black folk singing in sun-bathed cottonfields. But now he had discovered another, unsuspected side–a dark, brooding, fear-haunted side, and the discovery repelled him.

The oaken door sagged as it had before. The blackness of the interior was intensified by the beam of Buckner's light playing on the sill. That beam sliced through the darkness of the hallway and roved up the stair, and Griswell held his breath, clenching his fists. But no shape of lunacy leered down at them.

Buckner went in, walking light as a cat, torch in one hand, gun in the other.

As he swung his light into the room across from the stairway, Griswell cried out–and cried out again, almost fainting with the intolerable sickness at what he saw. A trail of blood drops led across the floor, crossing the blankets Branner had occupied, which lay between the door and those in which Griswell had lain. And Griswell's blankets had a terrible occupant. John Branner lay there, face down, his cleft head revealed in merciless clarity in the steady light. His outstretched hand still gripped the haft of a hatchet, and the blade was imbedded deep in the blanket and the floor beneath, just where Griswell's head had lain when he slept there.

A momentary rush of blackness engulfed Griswell. He was not aware that he staggered, or that Buckner caught him. When he could see and hear again, he was violently sick and hung his head against the mantel, retching miserably.

Buckner turned the light full on him, making him blink. Buckner's voice came from behind the blinding radiance, the man himself unseen.

"Griswell, you've told me a yarn that's hard to believe. I saw something chasin' you, but it might have been a timber wolf, or a mad dog.

"If you're holdin' back anything, you better spill it. What you told me won't hold up in any court. You're bound to be accused of killin' your partner. I'll have to arrest you. If you'll give me the straight goods now, it'll make it easier. Now, didn't you kill this fellow, Branner?

“Wasn’t it something like this: you quarreled, he grabbed a hatchet and swung at you, but you dodged and then let *him* have it?”

Griswell sank down and hid his face in his hands, his head swimming.

“Great God, man, I didn’t murder John! Why, we’ve been friends ever since we were children in school together. I’ve told you the truth. I don’t blame you for not believing me. But God help me, it is the truth!”

The light swung back to the gory head again, and Griswell closed his eyes.

He heard Buckner grunt.

“I believe this hatchet in his hand is the one he was killed with. Blood and brains plastered on the blade, and hairs stickin’ to it–hairs exactly the same color as his. This makes it tough for you, Griswell.”

“How so?” the New Englander asked dully.

“Knock any plea of self-defense in the head. Branner couldn’t have swung at you with this hatchet after you split his skull with it. You must have pulled the ax out of his head, stuck it into the floor and clamped his fingers on it to make it look like he’d attacked you. And it would have been damned clever–if you’d used another hatchet.”

“But I didn’t kill him,” groaned Griswell. “I have no intention of pleading self-defense.”

“That’s what puzzles me,” Buckner admitted frankly, straightening. “What murderer would rig up such a crazy story as you’ve told me, to prove his innocence? Average killer would have told a logical yarn, at least. Hmmm! Blood drops leadin’ from the door. The body was dragged–no, couldn’t have been dragged. The floor isn’t smeared. You must have carried it here, after killin’ him in some other place. But in that case, why isn’t there any blood on your clothes? Of course you could have changed clothes and washed your hands. But the fellow hasn’t been dead long.”

“He walked downstairs and across the room,” said Griswell hopelessly. “He came to kill me. I knew he was coming to kill me when I saw him lurching down the stair. He struck where I would have been, if I hadn’t awakened. That window–I burst out at it. You see it’s broken.”

“I see. But if he walked then, why isn’t he walkin’ now?”

“I don’t know! I’m too sick to think straight. I’ve been fearing that he’d rise up from the floor where he lies and come at me again. When I heard that wolf running up the road after me, I thought it was John chasing me–John, running through the night with his bloody ax and his bloody head, and his death-grin!”

His teeth chattered as he lived that horror over again.

Buckner let his light play across the floor.

“The blood drops lead into the hall. Come on. We’ll follow them.”

Griswell cringed. “They lead upstairs.”

Buckner’s eyes were fixed hard on him.

“Are you afraid to go upstairs, with me?”

Griswell’s face was gray.

“Yes. But I’m going, with you or without you. The thing that killed poor John may still be hiding up there.”

“Stay behind me,” ordered Buckner. “If anything jumps us, I’ll take care of it. But for your own sake, I warn you that I shoot quicker than a cat jumps, and I don’t often miss. If you’ve got any ideas of layin’

me out from behind, forget them.”

“Don’t be a fool!” Resentment got the better of his apprehension, and this outburst seemed to reassure Buckner more than any of his protestations of innocence.

“I want to be fair,” he said quietly. “I haven’t indicted and condemned you in my mind already. If only half of what you’re tellin’ me is the truth, you’ve been through a hell of an experience, and I don’t want to be too hard on you. But you can see how hard it is for me to believe all you’ve told me.”

Griswell wearily motioned for him to lead the way, unspeaking. They went out into the hall, paused at the landing. A thin string of crimson drops, distinct in the thick dust, led up the steps.

“Man’s tracks in the dust,” grunted Buckner. “Go slow, I’ve got to be sure of what I see, because we’re obliteratin’ them as we go up. Hmmm! One set goin’ up, one comin’ down. Same man. Not your tracks.

Branner was a bigger man than you are. Blood drops all the way–blood on the bannisters like a man had laid his bloody hand there–a smear of stuff that looks– *brains*. Now what–”

“He walked down the stair, a dead man,” shuddered Griswell. “Groping with one hand–the other gripping the hatchet that killed him.”

“Or was carried,” muttered the sheriff. “But if somebody carried him– *where are the tracks? ”*

They came out into the upper hallway, a vast, empty space of dust and shadows where time-crusted windows repelled the moonlight and the ring of Buckner’s torch seemed inadequate. Griswell trembled like a leaf. Here, in the darkness and horror, John Branner had died.

“Somebody whistled up here,” he muttered. “John came, as if he were being called.”

Buckner’s eyes were blazing strangely in the light.

“The footprints lead down the hall,” he muttered. “Same as on the stair–one set going, one coming. Same prints– *Judas! ”*

Behind him Griswell stifled a cry, for he had seen what prompted Buckner's exclamation. A few feet from the head of the stair Branner's footprints stopped abruptly, then returned, treading almost in the other tracks. And where the trail halted there was a great splash of blood on the dusty floor–and other tracks met it–tracks of bare feet, narrow but with splayed toes. They too receded in a second line from the spot.

Buckner bent over them, swearing.

"The tracks meet! And where they meet there's blood and brains on the floor! Branner must have been killed on that spot–with a blow from a hatchet. Bare feet coming out of the darkness to meet shod feet–then both turned away again; the shod feet went downstairs, the bare feet went back down the hall."

He directed his light down the hall. The footprints faded into darkness, beyond the reach of the beam. On either hand the closed doors of chambers were cryptic portals of mystery.

"Suppose your crazy tale *was* true," Buckner muttered, half to himself. "These aren't your tracks. They look like a woman's. Suppose somebody did whistle, and Branner went upstairs to investigate. Suppose somebody met him here in the dark and split his head. The signs and tracks would have been, in that case, just as they really are. But if that's so, why isn't Branner lyin' here where he was killed? Could he have lived long enough to take the hatchet away from whoever killed him, and stagger downstairs with it?"

"No, no!" Recollection gagged Griswell. "I *saw* him on the stair. He was dead. No man could live a minute after receiving such a wound."

"I believe it," muttered Buckner. "But–it's madness! Or else it's *too* clever–yet, what sane man would think up and work out such an elaborate and utterly insane plan to escape punishment for murder, when a simple plea of self-defense would have been so much more effective? No court would recognize that story. Well, let's follow these other tracks. They lead down the hall–here, what's this?"

With an icy clutch at his soul, Griswell saw the light was beginning to grow dim.

“This battery is new,” muttered Buckner, and for the first time Griswell caught an edge of fear in his voice. “Come on–out of here quick!”

The light had faded to a faint red glow. The darkness seemed straining into them, creeping with black cat-feet. Buckner retreated, pushing Griswell stumbling behind him as he walked backward, pistol cocked and lifted, down the dark hall. In the growing darkness Griswell heard what sounded like the stealthy opening of a door. And suddenly the blackness about them was vibrant with menace. Griswell knew Buckner sensed it as well as he, for the sheriff ’s hard body was tense and taut as a stalking panther’s.

But without haste he worked his way to the stair and backed down it, Griswell preceding him, and fighting the panic that urged him to scream and burst into mad flight. A ghastly thought brought icy sweat out on his flesh. *Suppose the dead man were creeping up the stair behind them in the dark, face frozen in the death-grin, blood-caked hatchet lifted to strike?*

This possibility so overpowered him that he was scarcely aware when his feet struck the level of the lower hallway, and he was only then aware that the light had grown brighter as they descended, until it now gleamed with its full power–but when Buckner turned it back up the stairway, it failed to illuminate the darkness that hung like a tangible fog at the head of the stair.

“The damn thing was conjured,” muttered Buckner. “Nothin’ else. It couldn’t act like that naturally.”

“Turn the light into the room,” begged Griswell. “See if John–if John is–”

He could not put the ghastly thought into words, but Buckner understood.

He swung the beam around, and Griswell had never dreamed that the sight of the gory body of a murdered man could bring such relief.

“He’s still there,” grunted Buckner. “If he walked after he was killed, he hasn’t walked since. But that thing–”

Again he turned the light up the stair, and stood chewing his lip and scowling. Three times he half lifted his gun. Griswell read his mind. The sheriff was tempted to plunge back up that stair, take his chance with the unknown. But common sense held him back.

“I wouldn’t have a chance in the dark,” he muttered. “And I’ve got a hunch the light would go out again.”

He turned and faced Griswell squarely.

“There’s no use dodgin’ the question. There’s somethin’ hellish in this house, and I believe I have an inklin’ of what it is. I don’t believe you killed Branner. Whatever killed him is up there–now. There’s a lot about your yarn that don’t sound sane; but there’s nothin’ sane about a flashlight goin’ out like this one did. I don’t believe that thing upstairs is human. I never met anything I was afraid to tackle in the dark before, but I’m not goin’ up there until daylight. It’s not long until dawn. We’ll wait for it out there on that gallery.”

The stars were already paling when they came out on the broad porch. Buckner seated himself on the balustrade, facing the door, his pistol dangling in his fingers. Griswell sat down near him and leaned back against a crumbling pillar. He shut his eyes, grateful for the faint breeze that seemed to cool his throbbing brain. He experienced a dull sense of unreality. He was a stranger in a strange land, a land that had become suddenly imbued with black horror. The shadow of the noose hovered above him, and in that dark house lay John Branner, with his butchered head–like the figments of a dream these facts spun and eddied in his brain until all merged in a gray twilight as sleep came uninvited to his weary soul.

He awoke to a cold white dawn and full memory of the horrors of the night. Mists curled about the stems of the pines, crawled in smoky wisps up the broken walk. Buckner was shaking him.

“Wake up! It’s daylight.”

Griswell rose, wincing at the stiffness of his limbs. His face was gray and old.

“I’m ready. Let’s go upstairs.”

“I’ve already been!” Buckner’s eyes burned in the early dawn. “I didn’t wake you up. I went as soon as it was light. I found nothin’.”

“The tracks of the bare feet–”

“Gone!”

“Gone?”

“Yes, gone! The dust had been disturbed all over the hall, from the point where Branner’s tracks ended; swept into corners. No chance of trackin’ anything there now. Something obliterated those tracks while we sat here, and I didn’t hear a sound. I’ve gone through the whole house. Not a sign of anything.”

Griswell shuddered at the thought of himself sleeping alone on the porch while Buckner conducted his exploration.

“What shall we do?” he asked listlessly. “With those tracks gone, there goes my only chance of proving my story.”

“We’ll take Branner’s body into the county seat,” answered Buckner. “Let me do the talkin’. If the authorities knew the facts as they appear, they’d insist on you being confined and indicted. I don’t believe you killed Branner–but neither a district attorney, judge nor jury would believe what you told me, or what happened to us last night. I’m handlin’ this thing my own way. I’m not goin’ to arrest you until I’ve exhausted every other possibility.

“Say nothin’ about what’s happened here, when we get to town. I’ll simply tell the district attorney that John Branner was killed by a party or parties unknown, and that I’m workin’ on the case.

“Are you game to come back with me to this house and spend the night here, sleepin’ in that room as you and Branner slept last night?”

Griswell went white, but answered as stoutly as his ancestors might have expressed their determination to hold their cabins in the teeth of the Pequots: “I’ll do it.”

“Let’s go then; help me pack the body out to your auto.”

Griswell’s soul revolted at the sight of John Branner’s bloodless face in the chill white dawn, and the feel of his clammy flesh. The gray fog wrapped wispy tentacles about their feet as they carried their grisly burden across the lawn.

II

THE SNAKE’S BROTHER

Again the shadows were lengthening over the pinelands, and again two men came bumping along the old road in a car with a New England license plate.

Buckner was driving. Griswell’s nerves were too shattered for him to trust himself at the wheel. He looked gaunt and haggard, and his face was still pallid. The strain of the day spent at the county seat was added to the horror that still rode his soul like the shadow of a black-winged vulture. He had not slept, had not tasted what he had eaten.

“I told you I’d tell you about the Blassenvilles,” said Buckner. “They were proud folks, haughty, and pretty damn ruthless when they wanted their way. They didn’t treat their niggers as well as the other planters did–got their ideas in the West Indies, I reckon. There was a streak of cruelty in them–especially Miss Celia, the last one of the family to come to these parts. That was long after the slaves had been freed, but she used to whip her mulatto maid just like she was a slave, the old folks say…The niggers said when a Blassenville died, the devil was always waitin’ for him out in the black pines.

“Well, after the Civil War they died off pretty fast, livin’ in poverty on the plantation which was allowed to go to ruin. Finally only four girls were left, sisters, livin’ in the old house and ekin’ out a bare livin’, with a few niggers livin’ in the old slave huts and workin’ the fields on the share. They kept to

themselves, bein' proud, and ashamed of their poverty. Folks wouldn't see them for months at a time. When they needed supplies they sent a nigger to town after them.

"But folks knew about it when Miss Celia came to live with them. She came from somewhere in the West Indies, where the whole family originally had its roots–a fine, handsome woman, they say, in the early thirties. But she didn't mix with folks any more than the girls did. She brought a mulatto maid with her, and the Blassenville cruelty cropped out in her treatment of this maid. I knew an old nigger, years ago, who swore he saw Miss Celia tie this girl up to a tree, stark naked, and whip her with a horsewhip.

Nobody was surprized when she disappeared. Everybody figured she'd run away, of course.

"Well, one day in the spring of 1890 Miss Elizabeth, the youngest girl, came in to town for the first time in maybe a year. She came after supplies. Said the niggers had all left the place. Talked a little more, too, a bit wild. Said Miss Celia had gone, without leaving any word. Said her sisters thought she'd gone back to the West Indies, but she believed her aunt *was still in the house*. She didn't say what she meant. Just got her supplies and pulled out for the Manor.

"A month went past, and a nigger came into town and said that Miss Elizabeth was livin' at the Manor alone. Said her three sisters weren't there any more, that they'd left one by one without givin' any word or explanation. She didn't know where they'd gone, and was afraid to stay there alone, but didn't know where else to go. She'd never known anything but the Manor, and had neither relatives nor friends. But she was in mortal terror of *something*. The nigger said she locked herself in her room at night and kept candles burnin' all night….

"It was a stormy spring night when Miss Elizabeth came tearin' into town on the one horse she owned, nearly dead from fright. She fell from her horse in the square; when she could talk she said she'd found a secret room in the Manor that had been forgotten for a hundred years. And she said that there she found her three sisters, dead, and hangin' by their necks from the

ceilin'. She said *something* chased her and nearly brained her with an ax as she ran out the front door, but somehow she got to the horse and got away. She was nearly crazy with fear, and didn't know what it was that chased her–said it looked like a woman with a yellow face.

"About a hundred men rode out there, right away. They searched the house from top to bottom, but they didn't find any secret room, or the remains of the sisters. But they did find a hatchet stickin' in the doorjamb downstairs, with some of Miss Elizabeth's hairs stuck on it, just as she'd said. She wouldn't go back there and show them how to find the secret door; almost went crazy when they suggested it.

"When she was able to travel, the people made up some money and loaned it to her–she was still too proud to accept charity–and she went to California. She never came back, but later it was learned, when she sent back to repay the money they'd loaned her, that she'd married out there.

"Nobody ever bought the house. It stood there just as she'd left it, and as the years passed folks stole all the furnishings out of it, poor white trash, I reckon. A nigger wouldn't go about it. But they came after sun-up and left long before sundown."

"What did the people think about Miss Elizabeth's story?" asked Griswell.

"Well, most folks thought she'd gone a little crazy, livin' in that old house alone. But some people believed that mulatto girl, Joan, didn't run away, after all. They believed she'd hidden in the woods, and glutted her hatred of the Blassenvilles by murderin' Miss Celia and the three girls. They beat up the woods with bloodhounds, but never found a trace of her. If there was a secret room in the house, she might have been hidin' there–if there was anything to that theory."

"She couldn't have been hiding there all these years," muttered Griswell. "Anyway, the thing in the house now isn't human."

Buckner wrenched the wheel around and turned into a dim trace that left the main road and meandered off through the pines.

“Where are you going?”

“There’s an old nigger that lives off this way a few miles. I want to talk to him. We’re up against something that takes more than white man’s sense. The black people know more than we do about some things. This old man is nearly a hundred years old. His master educated him when he was a boy, and after he was freed he traveled more extensively than most white men do. They say he’s a voodoo man.”

Griswell shivered at the phrase, staring uneasily at the green forest walls that shut them in. The scent of the pines was mingled with the odors of unfamiliar plants and blossoms. But underlying all was a reek of rot and decay. Again a sick abhorrence of these dark mysterious woodlands almost overpowered him.

“Voodoo!” he muttered. “I’d forgotten about that–I never could think of black magic in connection with the South. To me witchcraft was always associated with old crooked streets in waterfront towns, overhung by gabled roofs that were old when they were hanging witches in Salem; dark musty alleys where black cats and other things might steal at night. Witchcraft always meant the old towns of New England, to me–but all this is more terrible than any New England legend–these somber pines, old deserted houses, lost plantations, mysterious black people, old tales of madness and horror–God, what frightful, ancient terrors there are on this continent fools call ‘young’!”

“Here’s old Jacob’s hut,” announced Buckner, bringing the automobile to a halt.

Griswell saw a clearing and a small cabin squatting under the shadows of the huge trees. There pines gave way to oaks and cypresses, bearded with gray trailing moss, and behind the cabin lay the edge of a swamp that ran away under the dimness of the trees, choked with rank vegetation. A thin wisp of blue smoke curled up from the stick-and-mud chimney.

He followed Buckner to the tiny stoop, where the sheriff pushed open the leather-hinged door and strode in. Griswell blinked in the comparative dimness of the interior. A single small window let in a little daylight. An old

negro crouched beside the hearth, watching a pot stew over the open fire. He looked up as they entered, but did not rise. He seemed incredibly old. His face was a mass of wrinkles, and his eyes, dark and vital, were filmed momentarily at times as if his mind wandered.

Buckner motioned Griswell to sit down in a string-bottomed chair, and himself took a rudely-made bench near the hearth, facing the old man.

“Jacob,” he said bluntly, “the time’s come for you to talk. I know you know the secret of Blassenville Manor. I’ve never questioned you about it, because it wasn’t in my line. But a man was murdered there last night, and this man here may hang for it, unless you tell me what haunts that old house of the Blassenvilles.”

The old man’s eyes gleamed, then grew misty as if clouds of extreme age drifted across his brittle mind.

“The Blassenvilles,” he murmured, and his voice was mellow and rich, his speech not the patois of the piny woods darky. “They were proud people, sirs–proud and cruel. Some died in the war, some were killed in duels–the men-folks, sirs. Some died in the Manor–the old Manor–” His voice trailed off into unintelligible mumblings.

“What of the Manor?” asked Buckner patiently.

“Miss Celia was the proudest of them all,” the old man muttered. “The proudest and the cruelest. The black people hated her; Joan most of all. Joan had white blood in her, and she was proud, too. Miss Celia whipped her like a slave.”

“What is the secret of Blassenville Manor?” persisted Buckner.

The film faded from the old man’s eyes; they were dark as moonlit wells.

“What secret, sir? I do not understand.”

“Yes, you do. For years that old house has stood there with its mystery. You know the key to its riddle.”

The old man stirred the stew. He seemed perfectly rational now.

“Sir, life is sweet, even to an old black man.”

“You mean somebody would kill you if you told me?”

But the old man was mumbling again, his eyes clouded.

“Not somebody. No human. No human being. The black gods of the swamps. My secret is inviolate, guarded by the Big Serpent, the god above all gods. He would send a little brother to kiss me with his cold lips–a little brother with a white crescent moon on his head. I sold my soul to the Big Serpent when he made me maker of *zuvembies*–”

Buckner stiffened.

“I heard that word once before,” he said softly, “from the lips of a dying black man, when I was a child.

What does it mean?”

Fear filled the eyes of old Jacob.

“What have I said? No–no! I said nothing!”

“*Zuvembies*,” prompted Buckner.

“*Zuvembies*,” mechanically repeated the old man, his eyes vacant. “A *zuvembie* was once a woman–on the Slave Coast they know of them. The drums that whisper by night in the hills of Haiti tell of them. The makers of *zuvembies* are honored of the people of Damballah. It is death to speak of it to a white man–it is one of the Snake God’s forbidden secrets.”

“You speak of the *zuvembies*,” said Buckner softly.

“I must not speak of it,” mumbled the old man, and Griswell realized that he was thinking aloud, too far gone in his dotage to be aware that he was speaking at all. “No white man must know that I danced in the Black

Ceremony of the voodoo, and was made a maker of *zombies* and *zuvembies*. The Big Snake punishes loose tongues with death."

"A *zuvembie* is a woman?" prompted Buckner.

"*Was* a woman," the old Negro muttered. "*She* knew I was a maker of *zuvembies*–she came and stood in my hut and asked for the awful brew–the brew of ground snake-bones, and the blood of vampire bats, and the dew from a nighthawk's wings, and other elements unnamable. She had danced in the Black Ceremony–she was ripe to become a *zuvembie*–the Black Brew was all that was needed–the other was beautiful–I could not refuse her."

"Who?" demanded Buckner tensely, but the old man's head was sunk on his withered breast, and he did not reply. He seemed to slumber as he sat. Buckner shook him. "You gave a brew to make a woman a *zuvembie*–what is a *zuvembie*?"

The old man stirred resentfully and muttered drowsily.

"A *zuvembie* is no longer human. It knows neither relatives nor friends. It is one with the people of the Black World. It commands the natural demons–owls, bats, snakes and werewolves, and can fetch darkness to blot out a little light. It can be slain by lead or steel, but unless it is slain thus, it lives for ever, and it eats no such food as humans eat. It dwells like a bat in a cave or an old house. Time means naught to the *zuvembie*; an hour, a day, a year, all is one. It cannot speak human words, nor think as a human thinks, but it can hypnotize the living by the sound of its voice, and when it slays a man, it can command his lifeless body until the flesh is cold. As long as the blood flows, the corpse is its slave. Its pleasure lies in the slaughter of human beings."

"And why should one become a *zuvembie*?" asked Buckner softly.

"Hate," whispered the old man. "Hate! Revenge!"

"Was her name Joan?" murmured Buckner.

It was as if the name penetrated the fogs of senility that clouded the voodoo-man's mind. He shook himself and the film faded from his eyes, leaving them hard and gleaming as wet black marble.

"Joan?" he said slowly. "I have not heard that name for the span of a generation. I seem to have been sleeping, gentlemen; I do not remember–I ask your pardon. Old men fall asleep before the fire, like old dogs. You asked me of Blassenville Manor? Sir, if I were to tell you why I cannot answer you, you would deem it mere superstition. Yet the white man's God be my witness–"

As he spoke he was reaching across the hearth for a piece of firewood, groping among the heaps of sticks there. And his voice broke in a scream, as he jerked back his arm convulsively. And a horrible, thrashing, trailing *thing* came with it. Around the voodoo-man's arm a mottled length of that shape was wrapped and a wicked wedge-shaped head struck again in silent fury.

The old man fell on the hearth, screaming, upsetting the simmering pot and scattering the embers, and then Buckner caught up a billet of firewood and crushed that flat head. Cursing, he kicked aside the knotting, twisting trunk, glaring briefly at the mangled head. Old Jacob had ceased screaming and writhing; he lay still, staring glassily upward.

"Dead?" whispered Griswell.

"Dead as Judas Iscariot," snapped Buckner, frowning at the twitching reptile. "That infernal snake crammed enough poison into his veins to kill a dozen men his age. But I think it was the shock and fright that killed him."

"What shall we do?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"Leave the body on that bunk. Nothin' can hurt it, if we bolt the door so the wild hogs can't get in, or any cat. We'll carry it into town tomorrow. We've got work to do tonight. Let's get goin'."

Griswell shrank from touching the corpse, but he helped Buckner lift it on the rude bunk, and then stumbled hastily out of the hut. The sun was

hovering above the horizon, visible in dazzling red flame through the black stems of the trees.

They climbed into the car in silence, and went bumping back along the stumpy terrain.

“He said the Big Snake would send one of his brothers,” muttered Griswell.

“Nonsense!” snorted Buckner. “Snakes like warmth, and that swamp is full of them. It crawled in and coiled up among that firewood. Old Jacob disturbed it, and it bit him. Nothin’ supernatural about that.”

After a short silence he said, in a different voice, “That was the first time I ever saw a rattler strike without singin’ and the first time I ever saw a snake *with a white crescent moon on its head. ”*

They were turning into the main road before either spoke again.

“You think that the mulatto Joan has skulked in the house all these years?” Griswell asked.

“You heard what old Jacob said,” answered Buckner grimly. “Time means nothin’ to a *zuvembie*.”

As they made the last turn in the road, Griswell braced himself against the sight of Blassenville Manor looming black against the red sunset. When it came into view he bit his lip to keep from shrieking. The suggestion of cryptic horror came back in all its power.

“Look!” he whispered from dry lips as they came to a halt beside the road. Buckner grunted.

From the balustrades of the gallery rose a whirling cloud of pigeons that swept away into the sunset, black against the lurid glare….

III

THE CALL OF ZUVEMBIE

Both men sat rigid for a few moments after the pigeons had flown.

“Well, I’ve seen them at last,” muttered Buckner.

“Only the doomed see them, perhaps,” whispered Griswell. “That tramp saw them–”

“Well, we’ll see,” returned the Southerner tranquilly, as he climbed out of the car, but Griswell noticed him unconsciously hitch forward his scabbarded gun.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Their feet echoed on the broken brick walk. The blind windows reflected the sunset in sheets of flame. As they came into the broad hall Griswell saw the string of black marks that ran across the floor and into the chamber, marking the path of a dead man.

Buckner had brought blankets out of the automobile. He spread them before the fireplace.

“I’ll lie next to the door,” he said. “You lie where you did last night.”

“Shall we light a fire in the grate?” asked Griswell, dreading the thought of the blackness that would cloak the woods when the brief twilight had died.

“No. You’ve got a flashlight and so have I. We’ll lie here in the dark and see what happens. Can you use that gun I gave you?”

“I suppose so. I never fired a revolver, but I know how it’s done.”

“Well, leave the shootin’ to me, if possible.” The sheriff seated himself cross-legged on his blankets and emptied the cylinder of his big blue Colt, inspecting each cartridge with a critical eye before he replaced it.

Griswell prowled nervously back and forth, begrudging the slow fading of the light as a miser begrudges the waning of his gold. He leaned with one hand against the mantelpiece, staring down into the dust-covered ashes. The fire that produced those ashes must have been built by Elizabeth Blassenville, more than forty years before. The thought was depressing. Idly he stirred the dusty ashes with his toe.

Something came to view among the charred debris–a bit of paper, stained and yellowed. Still idly he bent and drew it out of the ashes. It was a note-book with moldering cardboard backs.

“What have you found?” asked Buckner, squinting down the gleaming barrel of his gun.

“Nothing but an old note-book. Looks like a diary. The pages are covered with writing–but the ink is so faded, and the paper is in such a state of decay that I can’t tell much about it. How do you suppose it came in the fireplace, without being burned up?”

“Thrown in long after the fire was out,” surmised Buckner. “Probably found and tossed in the fireplace by somebody who was in here stealin’ furniture. Likely somebody who couldn’t read.”

Griswell fluttered the crumbling leaves listlessly, straining his eyes in the fading light over the yellowed scrawls. Then he stiffened.

“Here’s an entry that’s legible! Listen!” He read:

“‘I know someone is in the house besides myself. I can hear someone prowling about at night when the sun has set and the pines are black outside. Often in the night I hear *it* fumbling at my door. *Who* is it? Is it one of my sisters? Is it Aunt Celia? If it is either of these, why does she steal so subtly about the house?

Why does she tug at my door, and glide away when I call to her? Shall I go to the door and go out to her? No, no! I dare not! I am afraid. Oh God, what shall I do? I dare not stay here–but where am I to go?’”

“By God!” ejaculated Buckner. “That must be Elizabeth Blassenville’s diary! Go on!”

“I can’t make out the rest of the page,” answered Griswell. “But a few pages further on I can make out some lines.” He read:

“‘Why did the negroes all run away when Aunt Celia disappeared? My sisters are dead. I know they are dead. I seem to sense that they died horribly, in fear and agony. But why? *Why?* If someone murdered Aunt Celia, why should that person murder my poor sisters? They were always kind to the black people.

Joan–’” He paused, scowling futilely.

“A piece of the page is torn out. Here’s another entry under another date–at least I judge it’s a date; I can’t make it out for sure.

“‘–the awful thing that the old negress hinted at? She named Jacob Blount, and Joan, but she would not speak plainly; perhaps she feared to–’ Part of it gone here; then: ‘No, no! How can it be? *She* is dead–or gone away. Yet–she was born and raised in the West Indies, and from hints she let fall in the past, I know she delved into the mysteries of the voodoo. I believe she even danced in one of their horrible ceremonies–how could she have been such a beast? And this–this horror. God, can such things be? I know not what to think. If it is *she* who roams the house at night, who fumbles at my door, who *whistles* so weirdly and sweetly–no, no, I must be going mad. If I stay here alone I shall die as hideously as my sisters must have died. Of that I am convinced.’”

The incoherent chronicle ended as abruptly as it had begun. Griswell was so engrossed in deciphering the scraps that he was not aware that darkness had stolen upon them, hardly aware that Buckner was holding his electric torch for him to read by. Waking from his abstraction he started and darted a quick glance at the black hallway.

“What do you make of it?”

“What I’ve suspected all the time,” answered Buckner. “That mulatto maid Joan turned *zuvembie* to avenge herself on Miss Celia. Probably hated the whole family as much as she did her mistress. She’d taken part in voodoo ceremonies on her native island until she was ‘ripe,’ as old Jacob said. All she needed was the Black Brew–he supplied that. She killed Miss Celia and the three older girls, and would have gotten Elizabeth but for chance. She’s been lurkin’ in this old house all these years, like a snake in a ruin.”

“But why should she murder a stranger?”

“You heard what old Jacob said,” reminded Buckner. “A *zuvembie* finds satisfaction in the slaughter of humans. She called Branner up the stair and split his head and stuck the hatchet in his hand, and sent him downstairs to murder you. No court will ever believe that, but if we can produce her body, that will be evidence enough to prove your innocence. My word will be taken, that she murdered Branner. Jacob said a *zuvembie* could be killed…in reporting this affair I don’t have to be too accurate in detail.”

“She came and peered over the balustrade of the stair at us,” muttered Griswell. “But why didn’t we find her tracks on the stair?”

“Maybe you dreamed it. Maybe a *zuvembie* can project her spirit–hell! Why try to rationalize something that’s outside the bounds of rationality? Let’s begin our watch.”

“Don’t turn out the light!” exclaimed Griswell involuntarily. Then he added: “Of course. Turn it out. We must be in the dark as”–he gagged a bit–“as Branner and I were.”

But fear like a physical sickness assailed him when the room was plunged in darkness. He lay trembling and his heart beat so heavily he felt as if he would suffocate.

“The West Indies must be the plague spot of the world,” muttered Buckner, a blur on his blankets. “I’ve heard of *zombies*. Never knew before what a *zuvembie* was. Evidently some drug concocted by the voodoo-men to induce madness in women. That doesn’t explain other things, though: the hypnotic powers, the abnormal longevity, the ability to control corpses–no, a *zuvembie* can’t be merely a madwoman. It’s a monster, something more and less than a human being, created by the magic that spawns in black swamps and jungles–well, we’ll see.”

His voice ceased, and in the silence Griswell heard the pounding of his own heart. Outside in the black woods a wolf howled eerily, and owls hooted. Then silence fell again like a black fog.

Griswell forced himself to lie still on his blankets. Time seemed at a standstill. He felt as if he were choking. The suspense was growing unendurable; the effort he made to control his crumbling nerves bathed his limbs in sweat. He clenched his teeth until his jaws ached and almost locked, and the nails of his fingers bit deeply into his palms.

He did not know what he was expecting. The fiend would strike again–but how? Would it be a horrible, sweet whistling, bare feet stealing down the creaking steps, or a sudden hatchet-stroke in the dark?

Would it choose him or Buckner? *Was Buckner already dead?* He could see nothing in the blackness, but he heard the man's steady breathing. The Southerner must have nerves of steel. Or was that Buckner breathing beside him, separated by a narrow strip of darkness? Had the fiend already struck in silence, and taken the sheriff 's place, there to lie in ghoulish glee until it was ready to strike?–a thousand hideous fancies assailed Griswell tooth and claw.

He began to feel that he would go mad if he did not leap to his feet, screaming, and burst frenziedly out of that accursed house–not even the fear of the gallows could keep him lying there in the darkness any longer–the rhythm of Buckner's breathing was suddenly broken, and Griswell felt as if a bucket of ice-water had been poured over him. From somewhere above them rose a sound of weird, sweet whistling….

Griswell's control snapped, plunging his brain into darkness deeper than the physical blackness which engulfed him. There was a period of absolute blankness, in which a realization of *motion* was his first sensation of awakening consciousness. He was running, madly, stumbling over an incredibly rough road.

All was darkness about him, and he ran blindly. Vaguely he realized that he must have bolted from the house, and fled for perhaps miles before his overwrought brain began to function. He did not care; dying on the gallows for a murder he never committed did not terrify him half as much as the thought of returning to that house of horror. He was overpowered by the urge to run–run–run as he was running now, blindly, until he reached the end of his endurance. The mist had not yet fully lifted from his brain, but he

was aware of a dull wonder that he could not see the stars through the black branches. He wished vaguely that he could see where he was going. He believed he must be climbing a hill, and that was strange, for he knew there were no hills within miles of the Manor. Then above and ahead of him a dim glow began.

He scrambled toward it, over ledge-like projections that were more and more and more taking on a disquieting symmetry. Then he was horror-stricken to realize that a sound was impacting on his ears– *a weird mocking whistle*. The sound swept the mists away. Why, what was this? *Where was he?*

Awakening and realization came like the stunning stroke of a butcher's maul. He was not fleeing along a road, or climbing a hill; he was mounting a stair. He was still in Blassenville Manor! *And he was climbing the stair!*

An inhuman scream burst from his lips. Above it the mad whistling rose in a ghoulish piping of demoniac triumph. He tried to stop–to turn back–even to fling himself over the balustrade. His shrieking rang unbearably in his own ears. But his will-power was shattered to bits. It did not exist. He had no will. He had dropped his flashlight, and he had forgotten the gun in his pocket. He could not command his own body. His legs, moving stiffly, worked like pieces of mechanism detached from his brain, obeying an outside will. Clumping methodically they carried him shrieking up the stair toward the witch-fire glow shimmering above him.

"Buckner!" he screamed. "Buckner! Help, for God's sake!"

His voice strangled in his throat. He had reached the upper landing. He was tottering down the hallway.

The whistling sank and ceased, but its impulsion still drove him on. He could not see from what source the dim glow came. It seemed to emanate from no central focus. But he saw a vague figure shambling toward him. It looked like a woman, but no human woman ever walked with that skulking gait, and no human woman ever had that face of horror, that leering yellow blur of lunacy–he tried to scream at the sight of that face, at the glint of keen steel in the uplifted claw-like hand–but his tongue was frozen.

Then something crashed deafeningly behind him, the shadows were split by a tongue of flame which lit a hideous figure falling backward. Hard on the heels of the report rang an inhuman squawk.

In the darkness that followed the flash Griswell fell to his knees and covered his face with his hands. He did not hear Buckner's voice. The Southerner's hand on his shoulder shook him out of his swoon.

A light in his eyes blinded him. He blinked, shaded his eyes, looked up into Buckner's face, bending at the rim of the circle of light. The sheriff was pale.

"Are you hurt? God, man, are you hurt? There's a butcher knife there on the floor–"

"I'm not hurt," mumbled Griswell. "You fired just in time–the fiend! Where is it? Where did it go?"

"Listen!"

Somewhere in the house there sounded a sickening flopping and flapping as of something that thrashed and struggled in its death convulsions.

"Jacob was right," said Buckner grimly. "Lead can kill them. I hit her, all right. Didn't dare use my flashlight, but there was enough light. When that whistlin' started you almost walked over me gettin' out. I knew you were hypnotized, or whatever it is. I followed you up the stairs. I was right behind you, but crouchin' low so she wouldn't see me, and maybe get away again. I almost waited too long before I fired–but the sight of her almost paralyzed me. Look!"

He flashed his light down the hall, and now it shone bright and clear. And it shone on an aperture gaping in the wall where no door had showed before.

"The secret panel Miss Elizabeth found!" Buckner snapped. "Come on!"

He ran across the hallway and Griswell followed him dazedly. The flopping and thrashing came from beyond that mysterious door, and now the sounds

had ceased.

The light revealed a narrow, tunnel-like corridor that evidently led through one of the thick walls. Buckner plunged into it without hesitation.

“Maybe it couldn’t think like a human,” he muttered, shining his light ahead of him. “But it had sense enough to erase its tracks last night so we couldn’t trail it to that point in the wall and maybe find the secret panel. There’s a room ahead–the secret room of the Blassenvilles!”

And Griswell cried out: “My God! It’s the windowless chamber I saw in my dream, with the three bodies hanging–ahhhhh!”

Buckner’s light playing about the circular chamber became suddenly motionless. In that wide ring of light three figures appeared, three dried, shriveled, mummy-like shapes, still clad in the moldering garments of the last century. Their slippers were clear of the floor as they hung by their withered necks from chains suspended from the ceiling.

“The three Blassenville sisters!” muttered Buckner. “Miss Elizabeth wasn’t crazy, after all.”

“Look!” Griswell could barely make his voice intelligible. “There–over there in the corner!”

The light moved, halted.

“Was that thing a woman once?” whispered Griswell. “God, look at that face, even in death. Look at those claw-like hands, with black talons like those of a beast. Yes, it was human, though–even the rags of an old ballroom gown. Why should a mulatto maid wear such a dress, I wonder?”

“This has been her lair for over forty years,” muttered Buckner, brooding over the grinning grisly thing sprawling in the corner. “This clears you, Griswell–a crazy woman with a hatchet–that’s all the authorities need to know. God, what a revenge!–what a foul revenge! Yet what a bestial nature she must have had, in the beginnin’, to delve into voodoo as she must have done–”

“The mulatto woman?” whispered Griswell, dimly sensing a horror that overshadowed all the rest of the terror.

Buckner shook his head. “We misunderstood old Jacob’s maunderin’s, and the things Miss Elizabeth wrote– *she* must have known, but family pride sealed her lips. Griswell, I understand now; the mulatto woman had her revenge, but not as we supposed. She didn’t drink the Black Brew old Jacob fixed for her. It was for somebody else, to be given secretly in her food, or coffee, no doubt. Then Joan ran away, leavin’ the seeds of the hell she’d sowed to grow.”

“That–that’s not the mulatto woman?” whispered Griswell.

“When I saw her out there in the hallway I knew she was no mulatto. And those distorted features still reflect a family likeness. I’ve seen her portrait, and I can’t be mistaken. There lies the creature that was once Celia Blassenville.”

The Dead Remember

Dodge City, Kansas,

November 3, 1877.

Mr. William L. Gordon,

Antioch, Texas.

Dear Bill:

I am writing you because I have got a feeling I am not long for this world. This may surprise you, because you know I was in good health when I left the herd, and I am not sick now as far as that goes, but just the same I believe I am as good as a dead man.

Before I tell you why I think so, I will tell you the rest of what I have to say, which is that we got to Dodge City all right with the herd, which tallied 3,400 head, and the trail boss, John Elston, got twenty dollars a head from Mr. R. J. Blaine, but Joe Richards, one of the boys, was killed by a steer

near the crossing of the Canadian. His sister, Mrs. Dick Westfall, lives near Seguin, and I wish you'd ride over and tell her about her brother. John Elston is sending her his saddle and bridle and gun and money.

Now, Bill, I will try to tell you why I know I'm a goner. You remember last August, just before I left for Kansas with the herd, they found that Old Joel, that used to be Colonel Henry's slave, and his woman dead—the ones that lived in that live-oak thicket down by Zavalla Creek. You know they called his woman Jezebel, and folks said she was a witch. She was a high-yellow gal and a lot younger than Joel.

She told fortunes, and even some of the white folks were afraid of her. I took no stock in those stories.

Well, when we was rounding up the cattle for the trail drive, I found myself near Zavalla Creek along toward sundown, and my horse was tired, and I was hungry, and I decided I'd stop in at Joel's and make his woman cook me something to eat. So I rode up to his hut in the middle of the live-oak grove, and Joel was cutting some wood to cook some beef which Jezebel had stewing over an open fire. I remember she had on a red and green checked dress. I won't likely forget that.

They told me to light and I done so, and set down and ate a hearty supper, then Joel brought out a bottle of tequila and we had a drink, and I said I could beat him shooting craps. He asked me if I had any dice, and I said no, and he said he had some dice and would roll me for a five-cent piece.

So we got to shooting craps, and drinking tequila, and I got pretty full and raring to go, but Joel won all my money, which was about five dollars and seventy-five cents. This made me mad, and I told him I'd take another drink and get on my horse and ride. But he said the bottle was empty, and I told him to get some more. He said he didn't have no more, and I got madder, and begun to swear and abuse him, because I was pretty drunk. Jezebel come to the door of the hut and tried to get me to ride on, but I told her I was free, white and twenty-one, and for her to look out, because I didn't have no use for smart high-yellow gals.

Then Joel got mad and said, yes, he had some more tequila in the hut, but he wouldn't give me a drink if I was dying of thirst. So I said: "Why, damn you, you get me drunk and take my money with crooked dice, and now you insult me. I've seen nigras hung for less than that."

He said: "You can't eat my beef and drink my licker and then call my dice crooked. No white man can do that. I'm just as tough as you are."

I said: "Damn your black soul, I'll kick you all over this flat."

He said: "White man, you won't kick nobody." Then he grabbed up the knife he'd been cutting beef with, and ran at me. I pulled my pistol and shot him twice through the belly. He fell down and I shot him again, through the head.

Then Jezebel come running out screaming and cursing, with an old muzzle-loading musket. She pointed it at me and pulled the trigger, but the cap burst without firing the piece, and I yelled for her to get back or I'd kill her. But she run in on me and swung the musket like a club. I dodged and it hit me a glancing lick, tearing the hide on the side of my head, and I clapped my pistol against her bosom and jerked the trigger.

The shot knocked her staggering back several foot, and she reeled and fell down on the ground, with her hand to her bosom and blood running out between her fingers.

I went over to her and stood looking down with the pistol in my hand, swearing and cursing her, and she looked up and said: "You've killed Joel and you've killed me, but by God, you won't live to brag about it. I curse you by the big snake and the black swamp and the white cock. Before this day rolls around again you'll be branding the devil's cows in hell. You'll see, I'll come to you when the time's ripe and ready."

Then the blood gushed out of her mouth and she fell back and I knew she was dead. Then I got scared and sobered up and got on my horse and rode. Nobody seen me, and I told the boys next day I got that bruise on the side of my head from a tree branch my horse had run me against. Nobody never

knew it was me that killed them two, and I wouldn't be telling you now, only I know I have not got long to live.

That curse has been dogging me, and there is no use trying to dodge it. All the way up the trail I could feel something following me. Before we got to Red River I found a rattlesnake coiled up in my boot one morning, and after that I slept with my boots on all the time. Then when we was crossing the Canadian it was up a little, and I was riding point, and the herd got to milling for no reason at all, and caught me in the mill. My horse drowned, and I would have, too, if Steve Kirby hadn't roped me and dragged me out from amongst them crazy cows. Then one of the hands was cleaning a buffalo rifle one night, and it went off in his hands and blowed a hole in my hat. By this time the boys was joking and saying I was a hoodoo.

But after we crossed the Canadian, the cattle stampeded on the clearest, quietest night I ever seen. I was riding night-herd and didn't see nor hear nothing that might have started it, but one of the boys said just before the break he heard a low wailing sound down amongst a grove of cottonwoods, and saw a strange blue light glimmering there. Anyway, the steers broke so sudden and unexpected they nearly caught me and I had to ride for all I was worth. There was steers behind me and on both sides of me, and if I hadn't been riding the fastest horse ever raised in South Texas, they'd have trampled me to a pulp.

Well, I finally pulled out of the fringe of them, and we spent all next day rounding them up out of the breaks. That was when Joe Richards got killed. We was out in the breaks, driving in a bunch of steers, and all at once, without any reason I could see, my horse gave an awful scream and rared and fell backward with me. I jumped off just in time to keep from getting mashed, and a big mossy horn give a bellow and come for me.

There wasn't a tree bigger than a bush anywhere near, so I tried to pull my pistol, and some way the hammer got jammed under my belt, and I couldn't get it loose. That wild steer wasn't more than ten jumps from me when Joe Richards roped it, and the horse, a green one, was jerked down and sideways.

As it fell, Joe tried to swing clear, but his spur caught in the back cinch, and the next instant that steer had drove both horns clean through him. It was an awful sight.

By that time I had my pistol out, and I shot the steer, but Joe was dead. He was tore up something terrible. We covered him up where he fell, and put up a wood cross, and John Elston carved on the name and date with his bowie knife.

After that the boys didn't joke any more about me being a hoodoo. They didn't say much of anything to me and I kept to myself, though the Lord knows, it wasn't any fault of mine as I can see.

Well, we got to Dodge City and sold the steers. And last night I dreamt I saw Jezebel, just as plain I see the pistol on my hip. She smiled like the devil himself and said something I couldn't understand, but she pointed at me, and I think I know what that means.

Bill, you'll never see me again. I'm a dead man. I don't know how I'll go out, but I feel I'll never live to see another sunrise. So I'm writing you this letter to let you know about this business and I reckon I've been a fool but it looks like a man just kind of has to go it blind and there is not any blazed trail to follow.

Anyway, whatever takes me will find me on my feet with my pistol drawed. I never knuckled down to anything alive, and I won't even to the dead. I am going out fighting, whatever comes. I keep my scabbard-end tied down, and I clean and oil my pistol every day. And, Bill, sometimes I think I am going crazy, but I reckon it is just thinking and dreaming so much about Jezebel; because I am using an old shirt of yours for cleaning rags, you know that black and white checked shirt you got at San Antonio last Christmas, but sometimes when I am cleaning my pistol with them rags, they don't look black and white any more. They turn to red and green, just the color of the dress Jezebel was wearing when I killed her.

Your brother,

Jim.

STATEMENT OF JOHN ELSTON,

NOVEMBER 4, 1877

My name is John Elston. I am the foreman of Mr. J. J. Connolly's ranch in Gonzales County, Texas. I was trail boss of the herd that Jim Gordon was employed on. I was sharing his hotel room with him. The morning of the third of November he seemed moody and wouldn't talk much. He would not go out with me, but said he was going to write a letter.

I did not see him again until that night. I came into the room to get something and he was cleaning his Colt's .45. I laughed and jokingly asked him if he was afraid of Bat Masterson, and he said: "John, what I'm afraid of ain't human, but I'm going out shooting if I can." I laughed and asked him what he was afraid of, and he said: "A high-yeller gal that's been dead four months." I thought he was drunk, and went on out. I don't know what time that was, but it was after dark.

I didn't see him again alive. About midnight I was passing the Big Chief saloon and I heard a shot, and a lot of people ran into the saloon. I heard somebody say a man was shot. I went in with the rest, and went on back into the back room. A man was lying in the doorway, with his legs out in the alley and his body in the door. He was covered with blood, but by his build and clothes I recognized Jim Gordon. He was dead. I did not see him killed, and know nothing beyond what I have already said.

STATEMENT OF MIKE O'DONNELL

My name is Michael Joseph O'Donnell. I am the bartender in the Big Chief saloon on the night-shift. A few minutes before midnight I noticed a cowboy talking to Sam Grimes just outside the saloon. They seemed to be arguing. After awhile the cowboy came on in and took a drink of whiskey at the bar. I noticed him because he wore a pistol, whereas the others had theirs out of sight, and because he looked so wild and pale. He looked like he was drunk, but I don't believe he was. I never saw a man who looked just like him.

I did not pay much attention to him after that because I was very busy tending bar. I suppose he must have gone on into the back room. At about midnight I heard a shot in the back room and Tom Allison ran out saying that a man had been shot. I was the first one to reach him. He was lying partly in the door and partly in the alley. I saw he wore a gun-belt and a Mexican carved holster and believed it to be the same man I had noticed earlier. His right hand was torn practically off, being just a mass of bloody tatters. His head was shattered in a way I had never seen caused by a gunshot. He was dead by the time I got there and it is my opinion he was killed instantly. While we were standing around him a man I knew to be John Elston came through the crowd and said: “My God, it’s Jim Gordon!”

STATEMENT OF DEPUTY GRIMES

My name is Sam Grimes. I am a deputy sheriff of Ford County, Kansas. I met the deceased, Jim Gordon, before the Big Chief saloon, at about twenty minutes until twelve, November 3rd. I saw he had his pistol buckled on, so I stopped him and asked him why he was carrying his pistol, and if he did not know it was against the law. He said he was packing it for protection. I told him if he was in danger it was my business to protect him, and he had better take his gun back to his hotel and leave it there till he was ready to leave town, because I saw by his clothes that he was a cowboy from Texas. He laughed and said: “Deputy, not even Wyatt Earp could protect me from my fate!” He went into the saloon.

I believed he was sick and out of his head, so I did not arrest him. I thought maybe he would take a drink and then go and leave his gun at his hotel as I had requested. I kept watching him to see that he did not make any play toward anybody in the saloon, but he noticed no one, took a drink at the bar, and went on into the back room.

A few minutes later a man ran out, shouting that somebody was killed. I went right to the back room, getting there just as Mike O’Donnell was bending over the man, who I believed to be the one I had accosted in the street. He had been killed by the bursting of the pistol in his hand. I don’t know who he was shooting at, if anybody. I found nobody in the alley, nor anybody who had seen the killing except Tom Allison. I did find pieces of

the pistol that had exploded, together with the end of the barrel, which I turned over to the coroner.

STATEMENT OF TOM ALLISON

My name is Thomas Allison. I am a teamster, employed by McFarlane & Company. On the night of November 3rd, I was in the Big Chief saloon. I did not notice the deceased when he came in. There was a lot of men in the saloon. I had had several drinks but was not drunk. I saw “Grizzly” Gullins, a buffalo hunter, approaching the entrance of the saloon. I had had trouble with him, and knew he was a bad man.

He was drunk and I did not want any trouble. I decided to go out the back way.

I went through the back room and saw a man sitting at a table with his head in his hands. I took no notice of him, but went on to the back door, which was bolted on the inside. I lifted the bolt and opened the door and started to step outside.

Then I saw a woman standing in front of me. The light was dim that streamed out into the alley through the open door, but I saw her plain enough to tell she was a Negro woman. I don’t know how she was dressed. She was not pure black but a light brown or yellow. I could tell that in the dim light. I was so surprised I stopped short, and she spoke to me and said: “Go tell Jim Gordon I’ve come for him.”

I said: “Who the devil are you and who is Jim Gordon?” She said: “The man in the back room sitting at the table; tell him I’ve come!”

Something made me turn cold all over, I can’t say why. I turned around and went back into the room, and said: “Are you Jim Gordon?” The man at the table looked up and I saw his face was pale and haggard. I said: “Somebody wants to see you.” He said: “Who wants to see me, stranger?” I said: “A high-yellow woman there at the back door.”

With that he heaved up from the chair, knocking it over along with the table. I thought he was crazy and fell back from him. His eyes were wild.

He gave a kind of strangled cry and rushed to the open door. I saw him glare out into the alley, and thought I heard a laugh from the darkness. Then he screamed again and jerked out his pistol and threw down on somebody I couldn't see.

There was a flash that blinded me and a terrible report, and when the smoke cleared a little, I saw the man lying in the door with his head and body covered with blood. His brains were oozing out, and there was blood all over his right hand. I ran to the front of the saloon, shouting for the bartender. I don't know whether he was shooting at the woman or not, or if anybody shot back. I never heard but the one shot, when his pistol burst.

CORONER'S REPORT

We, the coroner's jury, having held inquest over the remains of James A. Gordon, of Antioch, Texas, have reached a verdict of death by accidental gunshot wounds, caused by the bursting of the deceased's pistol, he having apparently failed to remove a cleaning rag from the barrel after cleaning it. Portions of the burnt rag were found in the barrel. They had evidently been a piece of a woman's red and green checked dress.

Signed:

J. S. Ordley, Coroner,

Richard Donovan,

Ezra Blaine,

Joseph T. Decker,

Jack Wiltshaw,

Alexander V. Williams.

The Fire of Asshurbanipal

Yar Ali squinted carefully down the blue barrel of his Lee-Enfield, called devoutly on Allah and sent a bullet through the brain of a flying rider.

“Allaho akbar!”

The big Afghan shouted in glee, waving his weapon above his head, “God is great! By Allah, *sahib*, I have sent another one of the dogs to Hell!”

His companion peered cautiously over the rim of the sand-pit they had scooped with their hands. He was a lean and wiry American, Steve Clarney by name.

“Good work, old horse,” said this person. “Four left. Look–they’re drawing off.”

The white-robed horsemen were indeed reining away, clustering together just out of accurate rifle-range, as if in council. There had been seven when they had first swooped down on the comrades, but the fire from the two rifles in the sand-pit had been deadly.

“Look, *sahib*–they abandon the fray!”

Yar Ali stood up boldly and shouted taunts at the departing riders, one of whom whirled and sent a bullet that kicked up sand thirty feet in front of the pit.

“They shoot like the sons of dogs,” said Yar Ali in complacent self-esteem. “By Allah, did you see that rogue plunge from his saddle as my lead went home? Up, *sahib*; let us run after them and cut them down!”

Paying no attention to this outrageous proposal–for he knew it was but one of the gestures Afghan nature continually demands–Steve rose, dusted off his breeches and gazing after the riders, now white specks far out on the desert, said musingly: “Those fellows ride as if they had some set purpose in mind–not a bit like men running from a licking.”

“Aye,” agreed Yar Ali promptly and seeing nothing inconsistent with his present attitude and recent bloodthirsty suggestion, “they ride after more of their kind–they are hawks who give up their prey not quickly. We had best move our position quickly, Steve *sahib*. They will come back–maybe in a few hours, maybe in a few days–it all depends on how far away lies the

oasis of their tribe. But they will be back. We have guns and lives–they want both. And behold."

The Afghan levered out the empty shell and slipped a single cartridge into the breech of his rifle.

"My last bullet, *sahib*."

Steve nodded. "I've got three left."

The raiders whom their bullets had knocked from the saddle had been looted by their own comrades.

No use searching the bodies which lay in the sand for ammunition. Steve lifted his canteen and shook it.

Not much water remained. He knew that Yar Ali had only a little more than he, though the big Afridi, bred in a barren land, had used and needed less water than did the American; although the latter, judged from a white man's standards, was hard and tough as a wolf. As Steve unscrewed the canteen cap and drank very sparingly, he mentally reviewed the chain of events that had led them to their present position.

Wanderers, soldiers of fortune, thrown together by chance and attracted to each other by mutual admiration, he and Yar Ali had wandered from India up through Turkistan and down through Persia, an oddly assorted but highly capable pair. Driven by the restless urge of inherent wanderlust, their avowed purpose–which they swore to and sometimes believed themselves–was the accumulation of some vague and undiscovered treasure, some pot of gold at the foot of some yet unborn rainbow.

Then in ancient Shiraz they had heard of the Fire of Asshurbanipal. From the lips of an ancient Persian trader, who only half believed what he repeated to them, they heard the tale that he in turn had heard from the babbling lips of delirium, in his distant youth. He had been a member of a caravan, fifty years before, which, wandering far on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf trading for pearls, had followed the tale of a rare pearl far into the desert.

The pearl, rumored found by a diver and stolen by a shaykh of the interior, they did not find, but they did pick up a Turk who was dying of starvation, thirst and a bullet wound in the thigh. As he died in delirium, he babbled a wild tale of a silent dead city of black stone set in the drifting sands of the desert far to the westward, and of a flaming gem clutched in the bony fingers of a skeleton on an ancient throne.

He had not dared bring it away with him, because of an overpowering brooding horror that haunted the place, and thirst had driven him into the desert again, where Bedouins had pursued and wounded him.

Yet he had escaped, riding hard until his horse fell under him. He died without telling how he had reached the mythical city in the first place, but the old trader thought he must have come from the northwest–a deserter from the Turkish army, making a desperate attempt to reach the Gulf.

The men of the caravan had made no attempt to plunge still further into the desert in search of the city; for, said the old trader, they believed it to be the ancient, ancient City of Evil spoken of in the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Alhazred–the city of the dead on which an ancient curse rested.

Legends named it vaguely: the Arabs called it *Beled-el-Djinn*, the City of Devils, and the Turks, *Kara-Shehr*, the Black City. And the gem was that ancient and accursed jewel belonging to a king of long ago, whom the Grecians called Sardanapalus and the Semitic peoples Asshurbanipal.

Steve had been fascinated by the tale. Admitting to himself that it was doubtless one of the ten thousand cock-and-bull myths mooted about the East, still there was a possibility that he and Yar Ali had stumbled onto a trace of that pot of rainbow gold for which they searched. And Yar Ali had heard hints before of a silent city of the sands; tales had followed the eastbound caravans over the high Persian uplands and across the sands of Turkistan, into the mountain country and beyond–vague tales, whispers of a black city of the djinn, deep in the hazes of a haunted desert.

So, following the trail of the legend, the companions had come from Shiraz to a village on the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, and there had heard more from an old man who had been a pearl-diver in his youth. The

loquacity of age was on him and he told tales repeated to him by wandering tribesmen who had them in turn from the wild nomads of the deep interior; and again Steve and Yar Ali heard of the still black city with giant beasts carved of stone, and the skeleton sultan who held the blazing gem.

And so, mentally swearing at himself for a fool, Steve had made the plunge, and Yar Ali, secure in the knowledge that all things lay on the lap of Allah, had come with him. Their scanty supply of money had been just sufficient to provide riding-camels and provisions for a bold flying invasion of the unknown.

Their only chart had been the vague rumors that placed the supposed location of Kara-Shehr.

There had been days of hard travel, pushing the beasts and conserving water and food. Then, deep in the desert they invaded, they had encountered a blinding sand-wind in which they had lost the camels. After that came long miles of staggering through the sands, battered by a flaming sun, subsisting on rapidly dwindling water from their canteens, and food Yar Ali had in a pouch. No thought of finding the mythical city now. They pushed on blindly, in hope of stumbling upon a spring; they knew that behind them no oases lay within a distance they could hope to cover on foot. It was a desperate chance, but their only one.

Then white-clad hawks had swooped down on them, out of the haze of the skyline, and from a shallow and hastily scooped trench the adventurers had exchanged shots with the wild riders who circled them at top speed. The bullets of the Bedouins had skipped through their makeshift fortifications, knocking dust into their eyes and flicking bits of cloth from their garments, but by good chance neither had been hit.

Their one bit of luck, reflected Clarney, as he cursed himself for a fool. What a mad venture it had been, anyway! To think that two men could so dare the desert and live, much less wrest from its abysmal bosom the secrets of the ages! And that crazy tale of a skeleton hand gripping a flaming jewel in a dead city–bosh! What utter rot! He must have been crazy himself to credit it, the American decided with the clarity of view that suffering and danger bring.

“Well, old horse,” said Steve, lifting his rifle, “let’s get going. It’s a toss-up if we die of thirst or get sniped off by the desert-brothers. Anyway, we’re doin’ no good here.”

“God gives,” agreed Yar Ali cheerfully. “The sun sinks westward. Soon the coolness of night will be upon us. Perhaps we shall find water yet, *sahib*. Look, the terrain changes to the south.”

Clarney shaded his eyes against the dying sun. Beyond a level, barren expanse of several miles width, the land did indeed become more broken; aborted hills were in evidence. The American slung his rifle over his arm and sighed.

“Heave ahead; we’re food for the buzzards anyhow.”

The sun sank and the moon rose, flooding the desert with weird silver light. Drifted sand glimmered in long ripples, as if a sea had suddenly been frozen into immobility. Steve, parched fiercely by a thirst he dared not fully quench, cursed beneath his breath. The desert was beautiful beneath the moon, with the beauty of a cold marble lorelei to lure men to destruction. What a mad quest! his weary brain reiterated; the Fire of Asshurbanipal retreated into the mazes of unreality with each dragging step. The desert became not merely a material wasteland, but the gray mists of the lost eons, in whose depths dreamed sunken things.

Clarney stumbled and swore; was he failing already? Yar Ali swung along with the easy, tireless stride of the mountain man, and Steve set his teeth, nerving himself to greater effort. They were entering the broken country at last, and the going became harder. Shallow gullies and narrow ravines knifed the earth with wavering patterns. Most of them were nearly filled with sand, and there was no trace of water.

“This country was once oasis country,” commented Yar Ali. “Allah knows how many centuries ago the sand took it, as the sand has taken so many cities in Turkistan.”

They swung on like dead men in a gray land of death. The moon grew red and sinister as she sank, and shadowy darkness settled over the desert

before they had reached a point where they could see what lay beyond the broken belt. Even the big Afghan's feet began to drag, and Steve kept himself erect only by a savage effort of will. At last they toiled up a sort of ridge, on the southern side of which the land sloped downward.

"We rest," declared Steve. "There's no water in this hellish country. No use in goin' on for ever. My legs are stiff as gun-barrels. I couldn't take another step to save my neck. Here's a kind of stunted cliff, about as high as a man's shoulder, facing south. We'll sleep in the lee of it."

"And shall we not keep watch, Steve *sahib*?"

"We don't," answered Steve. "If the Arabs cut our throats while we're asleep, so much the better.

We're goners anyhow."

With which optimistic observation Clarney lay down stiffly in the deep sand. But Yar Ali stood, leaning forward, straining his eyes into the elusive darkness that turned the star-flecked horizons to murky wells of shadow.

"Something lies on the skyline to the south," he muttered uneasily. "A hill? I cannot tell, or even be sure that I see anything at all."

"You're seeing mirages already," said Steve irritably. "Lie down and sleep."

And so saying Steve slumbered.

The sun in his eyes awoke him. He sat up, yawning, and his first sensation was that of thirst. He lifted his canteen and wet his lips. One drink left. Yar Ali still slept. Steve's eyes wandered over the southern horizon and he started. He kicked the recumbent Afghan.

"Hey, wake up, Ali. I reckon you weren't seeing things after all. There's your hill–and a queer-lookin'

one, too."

The Afridi woke as a wild thing wakes, instantly and completely, his hand leaping to his long knife as he glared about for enemies. His gaze followed Steve's pointing fingers and his eyes widened.

"By Allah and by Allah!" he swore. "We have come into a land of djinn! That is no hill–it is a city of stone in the midst of the sands!"

Steve bounded to his feet like a steel spring released. As he gazed with bated breath, a fierce shout escaped his lips. At his feet the slope of the ridge ran down into a wide and level expanse of sand that stretched away southward. And far away, across those sands, to his straining sight the "hill" slowly took shape, like a mirage growing from the drifting sands.

He saw great uneven walls, massive battlements; all about crawled the sands like a living, sensate thing, drifted high about the walls, softening the rugged outlines. No wonder that at first glance the whole had appeared like a hill.

"Kara-Shehr!" Clarney exclaimed fiercely. "Beled-el-Djinn! The city of the dead! It wasn't a pipe-dream after all! We've found it–by Heaven, we've found it! Come on! Let's go!"

Yar Ali shook his head uncertainly and muttered something about evil djinn under his breath, but he followed. The sight of the ruins had swept from Steve his thirst and hunger, and the fatigue that a few hours' sleep had not fully overcome. He trudged on swiftly, oblivious to the rising heat, his eyes gleaming with the lust of the explorer. It was not altogether greed for the fabled gem that had prompted Steve Clarney to risk his life in that grim wilderness; deep in his soul lurked the age-old heritage of the white man, the urge to seek out the hidden places of the world, and that urge had been stirred to the depths by the ancient tales.

Now as they crossed the level wastes that separated the broken land from the city, they saw the shattered walls take clearer form and shape, as if they grew out of the morning sky. The city seemed built of huge blocks of black stone, but how high the walls had been there was no telling because of the sand that drifted high about their base; in many places they had fallen away and the sand hid the fragments entirely.

The sun reached her zenith and thirst intruded itself in spite of zeal and enthusiasm, but Steve fiercely mastered his suffering. His lips were parched and swollen, but he would not take that last drink until he had reached the ruined city. Yar Ali wet his lips from his own canteen and tried to share the remainder with his friend. Steve shook his head and plodded on.

In the ferocious heat of the desert afternoon they reached the ruin, and passing through a wide breach in the crumbling wall, gazed on the dead city. Sand choked the ancient streets and lent fantastic form to huge, fallen and half-hidden columns. So crumbled into decay and so covered with sand was the whole that the explorers could make out little of the original plan of the city; now it was but a waste of drifted sand and crumbling stone over which brooded, like an invisible cloud, an aura of unspeakable antiquity.

But directly in front of them ran a broad avenue, the outline of which not even the ravaging sands and winds of time had been able to efface. On either side of the wide way were ranged huge columns, not unusually tall, even allowing for the sand that hid their bases, but incredibly massive. On the top of each column stood a figure carved from solid stone–great, somber images, half human, half bestial, partaking of the brooding brutishness of the whole city. Steve cried out in amazement.

“The winged bulls of Nineveh! The bulls with men’s heads! By the saints, Ali, the old tales are true! The Assyrians did build this city! The whole tale’s true! They must have come here when the Babylonians destroyed Assyria–why, this scene’s a dead ringer for pictures I’ve seen–reconstructed scenes of old Nineveh! And look!”

He pointed down the broad street to the great building which reared at the other end, a colossal, brooding edifice whose columns and walls of solid black stone blocks defied the winds and sands of time. The drifting, obliterating sea washed about its foundations, overflowing into its doorways, but it would require a thousand years to inundate the whole structure.

“An abode of devils!” muttered Yar Ali, uneasily.

“The temple of Baal!” exclaimed Steve. “Come on! I was afraid we’d find all the palaces and temples hidden by the sand and have to dig for the gem.”

“Little good it will do us,” muttered Yar Ali. “Here we die.”

“I reckon so.” Steve unscrewed the cap of his canteen. “Let’s take our last drink. Anyway, we’re safe from the Arabs. They’d never dare come here, with their superstitions. We’ll drink and then we’ll die, I reckon, but first we’ll find the jewel. When I pass out, I want to have it in my hand. Maybe a few centuries later some lucky son-of-a-gun will find our skeletons–and the gem. Here’s to him, whoever he is!”

With which grim jest Clarney drained his canteen and Yar Ali followed suit. They had played their last ace; the rest lay on the lap of Allah.

They strode up the broad way, and Yar Ali, utterly fearless in the face of human foes, glanced nervously to right and left, half expecting to see a horned and fantastic face leering at him from behind a column.

Steve himself felt the somber antiquity of the place, and almost found himself fearing a rush of bronze war chariots down the forgotten streets, or to hear the sudden menacing flare of bronze trumpets. The silence in dead cities was so much more intense, he reflected, than that on the open desert.

They came to the portals of the great temple. Rows of immense columns flanked the wide doorway, which was ankle-deep in sand, and from which sagged massive bronze frameworks that had once braced mighty doors, whose polished woodwork had rotted away centuries ago. They passed into a mighty hall of misty twilight, whose shadowy stone roof was upheld by columns like the trunks of forest trees. The whole effect of the architecture was one of awesome magnitude and sullen, breath-taking splendor, like a temple built by somber giants for the abode of dark gods.

Yar Ali walked fearfully, as if he expected to awake sleeping gods, and Steve, without the Afridi’s superstitions, yet felt the gloomy majesty of the place lay somber hands on his soul.

No trace of a footprint showed in the deep dust on the floor; half a century had passed since the affrighted and devil-ridden Turk had fled these silent halls. As for the Bedouins, it was easy to see why those superstitious sons of the desert shunned this haunted city–and haunted it was, not by actual ghosts, perhaps, but by the shadows of lost splendors.

As they trod the sands of the hall, which seemed endless, Steve pondered many questions: How did these fugitives from the wrath of frenzied rebels build this city? How did they pass through the country of their foes?–for Babylonia lay between Assyria and the Arabian desert. Yet there had been no other place for them to go; westward lay Syria and the sea, and north and east swarmed the “dangerous Medes,”

those fierce Aryans whose aid had stiffened the arm of Babylon to smite her foe to the dust.

Possibly, thought Steve, Kara-Shehr–whatever its name had been in those dim days–had been built as an outpost border city before the fall of the Assyrian empire, whither survivals of that overthrow fled. At any rate it was possible that Kara-Shehr had outlasted Nineveh by some centuries–a strange, hermit city, no doubt, cut off from the rest of the world.

Surely, as Yar Ali had said, this was once fertile country, watered by oases; and doubtless in the broken country they had passed over the night before, there had been quarries that furnished the stone for the building of the city.

Then what caused its downfall? Did the encroachment of the sands and the filling up of the springs cause the people to abandon it, or was Kara-Shehr a city of silence before the sands crept over the walls? Did the downfall come from within or without? Did civil war blot out the inhabitants, or were they slaughtered by some powerful foe from the desert? Clarney shook his head in baffled chagrin. The answers to those questions were lost in the maze of forgotten ages.

“Allaho akbar!” They had traversed the great shadowy hall and at its further end they came upon a hideous black stone altar, behind which loomed an ancient god, bestial and horrific. Steve shrugged his shoulders as he recognized the monstrous aspect of the image–aye, that was Baal, on

which black altar in other ages many a screaming, writhing, naked victim had offered up its naked soul. The idol embodied in its utter, abysmal and sullen bestiality the whole soul of this demoniac city. Surely, thought Steve, the builders of Nineveh and Kara-Shehr were cast in another mold from the people of today. Their art and culture were too ponderous, too grimly barren of the lighter aspects of humanity, to be wholly human, as modern man understands humanity. Their architecture was repellent; of high skill, yet so massive, sullen and brutish in effect as to be almost beyond the comprehension of moderns.

The adventurers passed through a narrow door which opened in the end of the hall close to the idol, and came into a series of wide, dim, dusty chambers connected by column-flanked corridors. Along these they strode in the gray ghostly light, and came at last to a wide stair, whose massive stone steps led upward and vanished in the gloom. Here Yar Ali halted.

“We have dared much, *sahib*,” he muttered. “Is it wise to dare more?”

Steve, aquiver with eagerness, yet understood the Afghan’s mind. “You mean we shouldn’t go up those stairs?”

“They have an evil look. To what chambers of silence and horror may they lead? When djinn haunt deserted buildings, they lurk in the upper chambers. At any moment a demon may bite off our heads.”

“We’re dead men anyhow,” grunted Steve. “But I tell you–you go on back through the hall and watch for the Arabs while I go upstairs.”

“Watch for a wind on the horizon,” responded the Afghan gloomily, shifting his rifle and loosening his long knife in its scabbard. “No Bedouin comes here. Lead on, *sahib*. Thou’rt mad after the manner of all Franks, but I would not leave thee to face the djinn alone.”

So the companions mounted the massive stairs, their feet sinking deep into the accumulated dust of centuries at each step. Up and up they went, to an incredible height, until the depths below merged into a vague gloom.

“We walk blind to our doom, *sahib*,” muttered Yar Ali. “*Allah il allah*–and Muhammad is his Prophet!

Nevertheless, I feel the presence of slumbering Evil and never again shall I hear the wind blowing up the Khyber Pass.”

Steve made no reply. He did not like the breathless silence that brooded over the ancient temple, nor the grisly gray light that filtered from some hidden source.

Now above them the gloom lightened somewhat and they emerged into a vast circular chamber, grayly illumined by light that filtered in through the high, pierced ceiling. But another radiance lent itself to the illumination. A cry burst from Steve’s lips, echoed by Yar Ali.

Standing on the top step of the broad stone stair, they looked directly across the broad chamber, with its dust-covered heavy tile floor and bare black stone walls. From about the center of the chamber, massive steps led up to a stone dais, and on this dais stood a marble throne. About this throne glowed and shimmered an uncanny light, and the awe-struck adventurers gasped as they saw its source. On the throne slumped a human skeleton, an almost shapeless mass of moldering bones. A fleshless hand sagged outstretched upon the broad marble throne-arm, and in its grisly clasp there pulsed and throbbed like a living thing, a great crimson stone.

The Fire of Asshurbanipal! Even after they had found the lost city Steve had not really allowed himself to believe that they would find the gem, or that it even existed in reality. Yet he could not doubt the evidence of his eyes, dazzled by that evil, incredible glow. With a fierce shout he sprang across the chamber and up the steps. Yar Ali was at his heels, but when Steve would have seized the gem, the Afghan laid a hand on his arm.

“Wait!” exclaimed the big Muhammadan. “Touch it not yet, *sahib*! A curse lies on ancient things–and surely this is a thing triply accursed! Else why has it lain here untouched in a country of thieves for so many centuries? It is not well to disturb the possessions of the dead.”

“Bosh!” snorted the American. “Superstitions! The Bedouins were scared by the tales that have come down to ’em from their ancestors. Being desert-dwellers they mistrust cities anyway, and no doubt this one had an evil reputation in its lifetime. And nobody except Bedouins have seen this place before, except that Turk, who was probably half demented with suffering.

“These bones may be those of the king mentioned in the legend–the dry desert air preserves such things indefinitely–but I doubt it. May be Assyrian–most likely Arab–some beggar that got the gem and then died on that throne for some reason or other.”

The Afghan scarcely heard him. He was gazing in fearful fascination at the great stone, as a hypnotized bird stares into a serpent’s eye.

“Look at it, *sahib*!” he whispered. “What is it? No such gem as this was ever cut by mortal hands! Look how it throbs and pulses like the heart of a cobra!”

Steve was looking, and he was aware of a strange undefined feeling of uneasiness. Well versed in the knowledge of precious stones, he had never seen a stone like this. At first glance he had supposed it to be a monster ruby, as told in the legends. Now he was not sure, and he had a nervous feeling that Yar Ali was right, that this was no natural, normal gem. He could not classify the style in which it was cut, and such was the power of its lurid radiance that he found it difficult to gaze at it closely for any length of time.

The whole setting was not one calculated to soothe restless nerves. The deep dust on the floor suggested an unwholesome antiquity; the gray light evoked a sense of unreality, and the heavy black walls towered grimly, hinting at hidden things.

“Let’s take the stone and go!” muttered Steve, an unaccustomed panicky dread rising in his bosom.

“Wait!” Yar Ali’s eyes were blazing, and he gazed, not at the gem, but at the sullen stone walls. “We are flies in the lair of the spider! *Sahib*, as Allah lives, it is more than the ghosts of old fears that lurk over this city of horror!

I feel the presence of peril, as I have felt it before–as I felt it in a jungle cavern where a python lurked unseen in the darkness–as I felt it in the temple of Thuggee where the hidden stranglers of Siva crouched to spring upon us–as I feel it now, tenfold!”

Steve’s hair prickled. He knew that Yar Ali was a grim veteran, not to be stampeded by silly fear or senseless panic; he well remembered the incidents referred to by the Afghan, as he remembered other occasions upon which Yar Ali’s Oriental telepathic instinct had warned him of danger before that danger was seen or heard.

“What is it, Yar Ali?” he whispered.

The Afghan shook his head, his eyes filled with a weird mysterious light as he listened to the dim occult promptings of his subconsciousness.

“I know not; I know it is close to us, and that it is very ancient and very evil. I think–” Suddenly he halted and wheeled, the eery light vanishing from his eyes to be replaced by a glare of wolf-like fear and suspicion.

“Hark, *sahib*!” he snapped. “Ghosts or dead men mount the stair!”

Steve stiffened as the stealthy pad of soft sandals on stone reached his ear.

OceanofPDF.com

“By Judas, Ali!” he rapped; “something’s out there–”

The ancient walls re-echoed to a chorus of wild yells as a horde of savage figures flooded the chamber.

For one dazed insane instant Steve believed wildly that they were being attacked by re-embodied warriors of a vanished age; then the spiteful crack of a bullet past his ear and the acrid smell of powder told him that their foes were material enough. Clarney cursed; in their fancied security they had been caught like rats in a trap by the pursuing Arabs.

Even as the American threw up his rifle, Yar Ali fired point-blank from the hip with deadly effect, hurled his empty rifle into the horde and went down the steps like a hurricane, his three-foot Khyber knife shimmering in his hairy hand. Into his gusto for battle went real relief that his foes were human. A bullet ripped the turban from his head, but an Arab went down with a split skull beneath the hillman’s first, shearing stroke.

A tall Bedouin clapped his gun-muzzle to the Afghan’s side, but before he could pull the trigger, Clarney’s bullet scattered his brains. The very number of the attackers hindered their onslaught on the big Afridi, whose tigerish quickness made shooting as dangerous to themselves as to him. The bulk of them swarmed about him, striking with simitar and rifle-stock while others charged up the steps after Steve. At that range there was no missing; the American simply thrust his rifle muzzle into a bearded face and blasted it into a ghastly ruin. The others came on, screaming like panthers.

And now as he prepared to expend his last cartridge, Clarney saw two things in one flashing instant–a wild warrior who, with froth on his beard and a heavy simitar uplifted, was almost upon him, and another who knelt on the floor drawing a careful bead on the plunging Yar Ali. Steve made an instant choice and fired over the shoulder of the charging swordsman, killing the rifleman–and voluntarily offering his own life for his friend’s; for the simitar was swinging at his own head. But even as the Arab swung, grunting with the force of the blow, his sandaled foot slipped on the marble steps and the curved blade, veering erratically from its arc, clashed on Steve’s rifle-barrel. In an instant the American clubbed his rifle, and as the

Bedouin recovered his balance and again heaved up the simitar, Clarney struck with all his rangy power, and stock and skull shattered together.

Then a heavy ball smacked into his shoulder, sickening him with the shock.

As he staggered dizzily, a Bedouin whipped a turban-cloth about his feet and jerked viciously. Clarney pitched headlong down the steps, to strike with stunning force. A gun-stock in a brown hand went up to dash out his brains, but an imperious command halted the blow.

“Slay him not, but bind him hand and foot.”

As Steve struggled dazedly against many gripping hands, it seemed to him that somewhere he had heard that imperious voice before.

The American’s downfall had occurred in a matter of seconds. Even as Steve’s second shot had cracked, Yar Ali had half severed a raider’s arm and himself received a numbing blow from a rifle-stock on his left shoulder. His sheepskin coat, worn despite the desert heat, saved his hide from half a dozen slashing knives. A rifle was discharged so close to his face that the powder burnt him fiercely, bringing a bloodthirsty yell from the maddened Afghan. As Yar Ali swung up his dripping blade the rifleman, ashy-faced, lifted his rifle above his head in both hands to parry the downward blow, whereat the Afridi, with a yelp of ferocious exultation, shifted as a jungle-cat strikes and plunged his long knife into the Arab’s belly. But at that instant a rifle-stock, swung with all the hearty ill-will its wielder could evoke, crashed against the giant’s head, laying open the scalp and dashing him to his knees.

With the dogged and silent ferocity of his breed, Yar Ali staggered blindly up again, slashing at foes he could scarcely see, but a storm of blows battered him down again, nor did his attackers cease beating him until he lay still. They would have finished him in short order then, but for another peremptory order from their chief; whereupon they bound the senseless knife-man and flung him down alongside Steve, who was fully conscious and aware of the savage hurt of the bullet in his shoulder.

He glared up at the tall Arab who stood looking down at him.

“Well, *sahib*,” said this one–and Steve saw he was no Bedouin–“do you not remember me?”

Steve scowled; a bullet-wound is no aid to concentration.

“You look familiar–by Judas!–you are! Nureddin El Mekru!”

“I am honored! The *sahib* remembers!” Nureddin salaamed mockingly. “And you remember, no doubt, the occasion on which you made me a present of–this?”

The dark eyes shadowed with bitter menace and the shaykh indicated a thin white scar on the angle of his jaw.

“I remember,” snarled Clarney, whom pain and anger did not tend to make docile. “It was in Somaliland, years ago. You were in the slave-trade then. A wretch of a nigger escaped from you and took refuge with me. You walked into my camp one night in your high-handed way, started a row and in the ensuing scrap you got a butcher-knife across your face. I wish I’d cut your lousy throat.”

“You had your chance,” answered the Arab. “Now the tables are turned.”

“I thought your stamping-ground lay west,” growled Clarney; “Yemen and the Somali country.”

“I quit the slave-trade long ago,” answered the shaykh. “It is an outworn game. I led a band of thieves in Yemen for a time; then again I was forced to change my location. I came here with a few faithful followers, and by Allah, those wild men nearly slit my throat at first. But I overcame their suspicions, and now I lead more men than have followed me in years.

“They whom you fought off yesterday were my men–scouts I had sent out ahead. My oasis lies far to the west. We have ridden for many days, for I was on my way to this very city. When my scouts rode in and told me of two wanderers, I did not alter my course, for I had business first in Beled-el-Djinn. We rode into the city from the west and saw your tracks in the

sand. We followed them, and you were blind buffalo who heard not our coming."

Steve snarled. "You wouldn't have caught us so easy, only we thought no Bedouin would dare come into Kara-Shehr."

Nureddin nodded. "But I am no Bedouin. I have traveled far and seen many lands and many races, and I have read many books. I know that fear is smoke, that the dead are dead, and that djinn and ghosts and curses are mists that the wind blows away. It was because of the tales of the red stone that I came into this forsaken desert. But it has taken months to persuade my men to ride with me here.

"But–I am here! And your presence is a delightful surprize. Doubtless you have guessed why I had you taken alive; I have more elaborate entertainment planned for you and that Pathan swine. Now–I take the Fire of Asshurbanipal and we will go."

He turned toward the dais, and one of his men, a bearded one-eyed giant, exclaimed, "Hold, my lord!

Ancient evil reigned here before the days of Muhammad! The djinn howl through these halls when the winds blow, and men have seen ghosts dancing on the walls beneath the moon. No man of mortals has dared this black city for a thousand years–save one, half a century ago, who fled shrieking.

"You have come here from Yemen; you do not know the ancient curse on this foul city, and this evil stone, which pulses like the red heart of Satan! We have followed you here against our judgment, because you have proven yourself a strong man, and have said you hold a charm against all evil beings.

You said you but wished to look on this mysterious gem, but now we see it is your intention to take it for yourself. Do not offend the djinn!"

"Nay, Nureddin, do not offend the djinn!" chorused the other Bedouins. The shaykh's own hard-bitten ruffians, standing in a compact group somewhat

apart from the Bedouins, said nothing; hardened to crimes and deeds of impiety, they were less affected by the superstitions of the desert men, to whom the dread tale of the accursed city had been repeated for centuries. Steve, even while hating Nureddin with concentrated venom, realized the magnetic power of the man, the innate leadership that had enabled him to overcome thus far the fears and traditions of ages.

“The curse is laid on infidels who invade the city,” answered Nureddin, “not on the Faithful. See, in this chamber have we overcome our *kafar* foes!”

A white-bearded desert hawk shook his head.

“The curse is more ancient than Muhammad, and recks not of race or creed. Evil men reared this black city in the dawn of the Beginnings of Days. They oppressed our ancestors of the black tents, and warred among themselves; aye, the black walls of this foul city were stained with blood, and echoed to the shouts of unholy revel and the whispers of dark intrigues.

“Thus came the stone to the city: there dwelt a magician at the court of Asshurbanipal, and the black wisdom of ages was not denied to him. To gain honor and power for himself, he dared the horrors of a nameless vast cavern in a dark, untraveled land, and from those fiend-haunted depths he brought that blazing gem, which is carved of the frozen flames of Hell! By reason of his fearful power in black magic, he put a spell on the demon which guarded the ancient gem, and so stole away the stone. And the demon slept in the cavern unknowing.

“So this magician–Xuthltan by name–dwelt in the court of the sultan Asshurbanipal and did magic and forecast events by scanning the lurid deeps of the stone, into which no eyes but his could look unblinded.

And men called the stone the Fire of Asshurbanipal, in honor of the king.

“But evil came upon the kingdom and men cried out that it was the curse of the djinn, and the sultan in great fear bade Xuthltan take the gem and cast it into the cavern from which he had taken it, lest worse ill befall them.

“Yet it was not the magician’s will to give up the gem wherein he read strange secrets of pre-Adamite days, and he fled to the rebel city of Kara-Shehr, where soon civil war broke out and men strove with one another to possess the gem. Then the king who ruled the city, coveting the stone, seized the magician and put him to death by torture, and in this very room he watched him die; with the gem in his hand the king sat upon the throne–even as he has sat throughout the centuries–even as now he sits!”

The Arab’s finger stabbed at the moldering bones on the marble throne, and the wild desert men blenched; even Nureddin’s own scoundrels recoiled, catching their breath, but the shaykh showed no sign of perturbation.

“As Xuthltan died,” continued the old Bedouin, “he cursed the stone whose magic had not saved him, and he shrieked aloud the fearful words which undid the spell he had put upon the demon in the cavern, and set the monster free. And crying out on the forgotten gods, Cthulhu and Koth and Yog-Sothoth, and all the pre-Adamite Dwellers in the black cities under the sea and the caverns of the earth, he called upon them to take back that which was theirs, and with his dying breath pronounced doom on the false king, and that doom was that the king should sit on his throne holding in his hand the Fire of Asshurbanipal until the thunder of Judgment Day.

“Thereat the great stone cried out as a live thing cries, and the king and his soldiers saw a black cloud spinning up from the floor, and out of the cloud blew a fetid wind, and out of the wind came a grisly shape which stretched forth fearsome paws and laid them on the king, who shriveled and died at their touch. And the soldiers fled screaming, and all the people of the city ran forth wailing into the desert, where they perished or gained through the wastes to the far oasis towns. Kara-Shehr lay silent and deserted, the haunt of the lizard and the jackal. And when some of the desert-people ventured into the city they found the king dead on his throne, clutching the blazing gem, but they dared not lay hand upon it, for they knew the demon lurked near to guard it through all the ages–as he lurks near even as we stand here.”

The warriors shuddered involuntarily and glanced about, and Nureddin said, “Why did he not come forth when the Franks entered the chamber? Is he deaf, that the sound of the combat has not awakened him?”

“We have not touched the gem,” answered the old Bedouin, “nor had the Franks molested it. Men have looked on it and lived; but no mortal may touch it and survive.”

Nureddin started to speak, gazed at the stubborn, uneasy faces and realized the futility of argument. His attitude changed abruptly.

“I am master here,” he snapped, dropping a hand to his holster. “I have not sweat and bled for this gem to be balked at the last by groundless fears! Stand back, all! Let any man cross me at the peril of his head!”

He faced them, his eyes blazing, and they fell back, cowed by the force of his ruthless personality. He strode boldly up the marble steps, and the Arabs caught their breath, recoiling toward the door; Yar Ali, conscious at last, groaned dismally. God! thought Steve, what a barbaric scene!–bound captives on the dust-heaped floor, wild warriors clustered about, gripping their weapons, the raw acrid scent of blood and burnt powder still fouling the air, corpses strewn in a horrid welter of blood, brains and entrails–and on the dais, the hawk-faced shaykh, oblivious to all except the evil crimson glow in the skeleton fingers that rested on the marble throne.

A tense silence gripped all as Nureddin stretched forth his hand slowly, as if hypnotized by the throbbing crimson light. And in Steve’s subconsciousness there shuddered a dim echo, as of something vast and loathsome waking suddenly from an age-long slumber. The American’s eyes moved instinctively toward the grim cyclopean walls. The jewel’s glow had altered strangely; it burned a deeper, darker red, angry and menacing.

“Heart of all evil,” murmured the shaykh, “how many princes died for thee in the Beginnings of Happenings? Surely the blood of kings throbs in thee. The sultans and the princesses and the generals who wore thee, they are dust and are forgotten, but thou blazest with majesty undimmed, fire of the world–”

Nureddin seized the stone. A shuddery wail broke from the Arabs, cut through by a sharp inhuman cry.

To Steve it seemed, horribly, that the great jewel had cried out like a living thing! The stone slipped from the shaykh's hand. Nureddin might have dropped it; to Steve it looked as though it leaped convulsively, as a live thing might leap. It rolled from the dais, bounding from step to step, with Nureddin springing after it, cursing as his clutching hand missed it. It struck the floor, veered sharply, and despite the deep dust, rolled like a revolving ball of fire toward the back wall. Nureddin was close upon it–it struck the wall–the shaykh's hand reached for it.

A scream of mortal fear ripped the tense silence. Without warning the solid wall had opened. Out of the black wall that gaped there, a tentacle shot and gripped the shaykh's body as a python girdles its victim, and jerked him headlong into the darkness. And then the wall showed blank and solid once more; only from within sounded a hideous, high-pitched, muffled screaming that chilled the blood of the listeners.

Howling wordlessly, the Arabs stampeded, jammed in a battling, screeching mass in the doorway, tore through and raced madly down the wide stairs.

Steve and Yar Ali, lying helplessly, heard the frenzied clamor of their flight fade away into the distance, and gazed in dumb horror at the grim wall. The shrieks had faded into a more horrific silence. Holding their breath, they heard suddenly a sound that froze the blood in their veins–the soft sliding of metal or stone in a groove. At the same time the hidden door began to open, and Steve caught a glimmer in the blackness that might have been the glitter of monstrous eyes. He closed his own eyes; he dared not look upon whatever horror slunk from that hideous black well. He knew that there are strains the human brain cannot stand, and every primitive instinct in his soul cried out to him that this thing was nightmare and lunacy. He sensed that Yar Ali likewise closed his eyes, and the two lay like dead men.

Clarney heard no sound, but he sensed the presence of a horrific evil too grisly for human comprehension–of an Invader from Outer Gulfs and far black reaches of cosmic being. A deadly cold pervaded the chamber, and Steve felt the glare of inhuman eyes sear through his closed lids and freeze his consciousness. If he looked, if he opened his eyes, he knew stark black madness would be his instant lot.

He felt a soul-shakingly foul breath against his face and knew that the monster was bending close above him, but he lay like a man frozen in a nightmare. He clung to one thought: neither he nor Yar Ali had touched the jewel this horror guarded.

Then he no longer smelled the foul odor, the coldness in the air grew appreciably less, and he heard again the secret door slide in its groove. The fiend was returning to its hiding-place. Not all the legions of Hell could have prevented Steve's eyes from opening a trifle. He had only a glimpse as the hidden door slid to–and that one glimpse was enough to drive all consciousness from his brain. Steve Clarney, iron-nerved adventurer, fainted for the only time in his checkered life.

How long he lay there Steve never knew, but it could not have been long, for he was roused by Yar Ali's whisper, "Lie still, *sahib*, a little shifting of my body and I can reach thy cords with my teeth."

Steve felt the Afghan's powerful teeth at work on his bonds, and as he lay with his face jammed into the thick dust, and his wounded shoulder began to throb agonizingly–he had forgotten it until now–he began to gather the wandering threads of his consciousness, and it all came back to him. How much, he wondered dazedly, had been the nightmares of delirium, born from suffering and the thirst that caked his throat? The fight with the Arabs had been real–the bonds and the wounds showed that–but the grisly doom of the shaykh–the thing that had crept out of the black entrance in the wall–surely that had been a figment of delirium. Nureddin had fallen into a well or pit of some sort–Steve felt his hands were free and he rose to a sitting posture, fumbling for a pocket-knife the Arabs had overlooked. He did not look up or about the chamber as he slashed the cords that bound his ankles, and then freed Yar Ali, working awkwardly because his left arm was stiff and useless.

"Where are the Bedouins?" he asked, as the Afghan rose, lifting him to his feet.

"Allah, *sahib*," whispered Yar Ali, "are you mad? Have you forgotten? Let us go quickly before the djinn returns!"

“It was a nightmare,” muttered Steve. “Look–the jewel is back on the throne–” His voice died out. Again that red glow throbbed about the ancient throne, reflecting from the moldering skull; again in the outstretched finger-bones pulsed the Fire of Asshurbanipal. But at the foot of the throne lay another object that had not been there before–the severed head of Nureddin el Mekru stared sightlessly up at the gray light filtering through the stone ceiling. The bloodless lips were drawn back from the teeth in a ghastly grin, the staring eyes mirrored an intolerable horror. In the thick dust of the floor three spoors showed–one of the shaykh’s where he had followed the red jewel as it rolled to the wall, and above it two other sets of tracks, coming to the throne and returning to the wall–vast, shapeless tracks, as of splayed feet, taloned and gigantic, neither human nor animal.

“My God!” choked Steve. “It was true–and the Thing–the Thing I saw–”

Steve remembered the flight from that chamber as a rushing nightmare, in which he and his companion hurtled headlong down an endless stair that was a gray well of fear, raced blindly through dusty silent chambers, past the glowering idol in the mighty hall and into the blazing light of the desert sun, where they fell slavering, fighting for breath.

Again Steve was roused by the Afridi’s voice: “*Sahib, sahib,* in the Name of Allah the Compassionate, our luck has turned!”

Steve looked at his companion as a man might look in a trance. The big Afghan’s garments were in tatters, and blood-soaked. He was stained with dust and caked with blood, and his voice was a croak.

But his eyes were alight with hope and he pointed with a trembling finger.

“In the shade of yon ruined wall!” he croaked, striving to moisten his blackened lips. “*Allah il allah!* The horses of the men we killed! With canteens and food-pouches at the saddle-horns! Those dogs fled without halting for the steeds of their comrades!”

New life surged up into Steve’s bosom and he rose, staggering.

“Out of here,” he mumbled. “Out of here, quick!”

Like dying men they stumbled to the horses, tore them loose and climbed fumblingly into the saddles.

“We’ll lead the spare mounts,” croaked Steve, and Yar Ali nodded emphatic agreement.

“Belike we shall need them ere we sight the coast.”

Though their tortured nerves screamed for the water that swung in canteens at the saddle-horns, they turned the mounts aside and, swaying in the saddle, rode like flying corpses down the long sandy street of Kara-Shehr, between the ruined palaces and the crumbling columns, crossed the fallen wall and swept out into the desert. Not once did either glance back toward that black pile of ancient horror, nor did either speak until the ruins faded into the hazy distance. Then and only then did they draw rein and ease their thirst.

“Allah il allah!” said Yar Ali piously. “Those dogs have beaten me until it is as though every bone in my body were broken. Dismount, I beg thee, *sahib*, and let me probe for that accursed bullet, and dress thy shoulder to the best of my meager ability.”

While this was going on, Yar Ali spoke, avoiding his friend’s eye, “You said, *sahib*, you said something about–about seeing? What saw ye, in Allah’s name?”

A strong shudder shook the American’s steely frame.

“You didn’t look when–when the–the Thing put back the jewel in the skeleton’s hand and left Nureddin’s head on the dais?”

“By Allah, not I!” swore Yar Ali. “My eyes were as closed as if they had been welded together by the molten irons of Satan!”

Steve made no reply until the comrades had once more swung into the saddle and started on their long trek for the coast, which, with spare horses, food, water and weapons, they had a good chance to reach.

“I looked,” the American said somberly. “I wish I had not; I know I’ll dream about it for the rest of my life. I had only a glance; I couldn’t describe it as a man describes an earthly thing. God help me, it wasn’t earthly or sane either. Mankind isn’t the first owner of the earth; there were Beings here before his coming–and now, survivals of hideously ancient epochs. Maybe spheres of alien dimensions press unseen on this material universe today. Sorcerers have called up sleeping devils before now and controlled them with magic. It is not unreasonable to suppose an Assyrian magician could invoke an elemental demon out of the earth to avenge him and guard something that must have come out of Hell in the first place.

“I’ll try to tell you what I glimpsed; then we’ll never speak of it again. It was gigantic and black and shadowy; it was a hulking monstrosity that walked upright like a man, but it was like a toad, too, and it was winged and tentacled. I saw only its back; if I’d seen the front of it–its face–I’d have undoubtedly lost my mind. The old Arab was right; God help us, it was the monster that Xuthltan called up out of the dark blind caverns of the earth to guard the Fire of Asshurbanipal!”

Fragment

And so his boyhood wandered into youth,

And still the hazes thickened round his head,

And red, lascivious nightmares shared his bed

And fantasies with greedy claw and tooth

Burrowed into the secret parts of him–

Gigantic, bestial and misshapen paws

Gloatingly fumbled each white youthful limb,

And shadows lurked with scarlet gaping jaws.

Deeper and deeper in a twisting maze

Of monstrous shadows, shot with red and black,

Or gray as dull decay and rainy days,

He stumbled onward. Ever at his back

He heard the lecherous laughter of the ghouls.

Under the fungoid trees lay stagnant pools

Wherein he sometimes plunged up to his waist

And shrieked and scrambled out with loathing haste,

Feeling unnumbered slimy fingers press

His shrinking flesh with evil, dank caress.

Life was a cesspool of obscenity–

He saw through eyes accursed with unveiled sight–

Where Lust ran rampant through a screaming Night

And black-faced swine roared from the Devil’s styes;

Where grinning corpses, fiend-inhabited,

Walked through the world with taloned hands outspread;

Where beast and monster swaggered side by side,

And unseen demons strummed a maddening tune;

And naked witches, young and brazen-eyed,

Flaunted their buttocks to a lustful moon.

Rank, shambling devils chased him night on night,

And caught and bore him to a flaming hall,

Where lambent in the flaring crimson light

A thousand long-tongued faces lined the wall.

And there they flung him, naked and a-sprawl

Before a great dark woman’s ebon throne.

How dark, inhuman, strange, her deep eyes shone!

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

Small poets sing of little, foolish things,

As more befitting to a shallow brain

That dreams not of pre-Atlantean kings,

Nor launches on that dark uncharted Main

That holds grim islands and unholy tides,

Where many a black mysterious secret hides.

True rime concerns her not with bursting buds,

The chirping bird, the lifting of the rose—

Save ebon blooms that swell in ghastly woods,

And that grim, voiceless bird that ever broods

Where through black boughs a wind of horror blows.

Oh, little singers, what know you of those

Ungodly, slimy shapes that glide and crawl

Out of unreckoned gulfs when midnights fall,

To haunt a poet’s slumbering, and close

Against his eyes thrust up their hissing head,

And mock him with their eyes so serpent-red?

Conceived and bred in blackened pits of hell,

The poems come that set the stars on fire;

Born of black maggots writhing in a shell

Men call a poet’s skull—an iron bell

Filled up with burning mist and golden mire.

The royal purple is a moldy shroud;

The laurel crown is cypress fixed with thorns;

The sword of fame, a sickle notched and dull;

The face of beauty is a grinning skull;

And ever in *their* souls’ red caverns loud

The rattle of cloven hoofs and horns.

The poets know that justice is a lie,

That good and light are baubles filled with dust—

This world’s slave-market where swine sell and buy,

This shambles where the howling cattle die,

Has blinded not their eyes with lies and lust.

Miscellanea

Golnor the Ape

There are those of you who will not understand how I, the village fool, the imbecile, the beastman, might set down the strange happenings which took place in the sea-coast village where I wandered aforetime, warring with the fen wolves for refuse. But the tale of how I, Golnor the Ape, became a man, has its place in the tale, which is an eery tale and a curious one.

How I came by my strange name, which has no meaning in any language of the world, is easy to say, for it was myself that gave it to me, for the words of men; though the tavern keeper on whose doorstep I was left one summer night called me by some other name which I have forgotten.

My first memory is of sprawling among wine-barrels, on the dirty flag floor and–but I started not to pen the tale of the life of Golnor the Ape. Let my younger years fade back into the strange haze from which they came, with their strange dreams and visions, their monstrous, mystic shapes, and the rest: the scrubbing of floors and tankards, the beatings, the petty persecutions–let them fade as the name the tavern keeper gave me has faded.

I do not know how old I was when Helene de Say came to the village of Fenblane. When first I saw her, I was wading in the marsh upon the moor, searching for mussels, and I looked up as she rode by on a great white horse. Now, a white horse was a wonderful being to me and I stood gaping after them, but giving little heed to the girl. I was dimly aware that she shrank from me as she passed, and her face showed loathing, but all humans were the same with Golnor the Ape.

I was a large man, not tall, but the sweep of my sloping shoulders was wide, and mighty was my chest. I bent forward as I walked, lurching on bow legs, my long arms swinging. They were twisted and massive, those arms, with lean, corded muscles, powerful, unbeautiful. As I never had shoes, my feet were large, shapeless and remarkably tough. But mayhap my most primitive feature was my hair. Long, wild and coarse, of a rough dun color, it tumbled over my low, slanting forehead; and through it, from beneath beetling,

overhanging brows, my small eyes glittered eerily. Those eyes saw many things unknown to the human race, for in my youth I lived in two worlds. There were the lecas, for instance. I conversed with them constantly and it was they who told me all the strange secrets of the Dim World. And there were others, gerbas and monsters, who sometimes drove me shrieking across the moor, and would have dragged me back to that world entirely if they had had power.

I could not describe any of those beings to you, for there are no words in your language that would fit anything about them. I could speak their language much better than I could that of the villagers of Fenblane, and even now the speech comes strange to me so that my talking sounds not like the talking of other men.

Sometimes I would wander in the village, to do such work as I had the intelligence to do, and receive in turn food which the villagers did not want. More often I roamed about the fen, hunting clams and mussels, and contending with the wolves for their kill. Often I would climb the lonely cliffs that looked out across the sea, and sit there for hours, thinking strange, grotesque thoughts–thoughts which now, being a man, I can scarcely remember. If I could find people who would tolerate me for awhile, I would strive to tell them of my thoughts and of the lecas who flitted about me, and of the beings who danced incessantly on the waves. But the result was always a gibberish so strange that the people would either laugh at me or beat me.

Then sometimes, when the sea was flailing the cliffs, and the wind was yelling among the crags and lashing my wild hair about my eyes, I would thrill with a strange, furious elation, become wildly excited, and standing upright, leaning to the might of the wind, I would brandish my arms and mock the gale, and try to tell the lecas all that surged in my soul. But there again I was handicapped, for the lecas knew no more of my human world than the villagers of Fenblane knew of theirs. I was a strange half-being pausing on the threshold of two worlds.

There was once, when, in a gust of futile passion, and without knowing why, I leaped from the cliff and hurtled down, down, down, until I crashed among the white-crested waves and plunged down through them for

fathoms, until I floated up again and by some strange miracle was flung ashore, bruised and battered but unharmed.

I liked the cliffs with their singing wind-noises, and the bellowing ocean, but in the village and on the fen I sought food. When a child, people in the village kicked and beat me so that I liked not to go there, though the persecution ceased when I grew older and stronger. Just outside the village, however, overlooking it, loomed the ancient castle of the de Says, and there I liked to go, for the building was one of curiosity and admiration to me, though usually old Dame de Say sent her servants to beat me away.

However, on icy nights I have slept in the stables, unknown to the old shrew, among the horses who minded not my company. Beasts never feared me, nor I them, feeling perhaps a greater kinship toward them than toward humans.

Helene was niece to the old Dame, whom she resembled not at all. It was outside the castle I saw the girl again. I had come there to catch another look at the great white horse, which I thought marvelous, having never seen one like him, and the servants sallied forth to drub me with cudgels.

They had not struck one blow when there sounded a quick, light step behind us, and Helene stepped between. Her eyes, fine, grey eyes, were flashing, and I mazily realized that she was beautiful.

“What!” she exclaimed, as the servants cringed back before her. “Would you beat this creature? Have you no shame?”

“Your aunt commanded us to thrash him,” said one of the servants.

“I care not. You will obey me.” Then as they hastened to get away she turned to me. “What is your name?”

“Golnor, mistress; aye, I am Golnor. I can scrub tankards and clean stables and chop wood and row boats.”

“Never mind.” She smiled and her teeth were like pearls. “Come to the kitchen and I will give you food.”

I was her slave from that moment. Not that I followed her about to do her bidding. The old Dame would never have tolerated that, nor do I think that Helene, for all her kindness, would have cared to have been followed by a filthy imbecile in scanty and ragged garments.

There was rain on the day that the Baron rode down to the village of Fenblane. Squatting among the fenrushes and talking with the lecas, I did not see him, nor hear his horse splashing through the mud until he loomed above me, and slashed me with his riding whip as I scrambled out of the way.

A great, dark man was he, with gleaming eyes and thin, cruel lips. A rapier swung at his hip, and he was clothed finely, but about him hovered the lurid yellow haze that marks a wicked soul, and which only a creature of the shadow world may see.

Where would he be riding but to Castle de Say to see the girl of whom he had heard? Later I saw him riding back through the rain, a smile on his lips. I watched him, eyes aglitter, until he was only a moving smudge in the curtain of rain, at last vanishing entirely. Usually I forgot anything or anyone the instant I was out of sight. The world, the universe, was represented by the village of Fenblane and a great circle which included moor, cliffs and sea. When one rode out of Fenblane, he or she rode out of the world.

But I remembered the Baron and the wicked smile on his lips, until I saw him again.

There was sun and a clear windy sky when I next saw Helene. She and her aunt had ridden out on the moor and they dismounted beside a lake, sat upon the bank and let the horses graze. Unnoticed, I stole up close and listened to what they said.

“But I will not!” said Helene. “I do not love the man–”

“You shall learn,” said the old Dame. “And this talk of love is foolishness. The Baron is a strong man and has gold and lands.”

“But Francois–”

“Bah. A penniless student. I shall not allow you to make a fool of yourself.”

“But–”

“Enough, I tell you. If the Baron wishes your hand, he shall have you.”

“But perhaps he will not wish me.”

“Then you shall find ways of encouraging him. What? Bah. Have your silly notions of honor ever put gold in your purse or garments on your back? You will do as I say.”

Presently they mounted their horses and rode away and I sat me down to muse over what had been said and to study meaning from their words. I thought and thought until my head was dizzy, but could make nothing of it, so gave it up and went searching for clams.

Later I climbed the cliffs as the moon rose over the sea, making a path of silver light across the waves. I again turned my mind toward the conversation. Words and phrases flitted through my mind, and putting them together to piece out complete thoughts was like a puzzle.

Finally I gave it up entirely, and one day, wandering among the cliffs, decided to visit the Witch of Wolf

’s Cavern. She was among the few humans who would tolerate me for a short while, for I always gave her the village gossip, garbled and labored to be sure, but from the gibberish she could usually piece together information to use to her own advantage. I was in awe of her somewhat, but had I had intelligence I would have despised her, for, far from having enough knowledge of the occult to understand my vague talk of lecas and gerbas and the like, she clothed those beings with the likenesses of the demons and familiars of her own tawdry and filthy witchcraft. She considered me devil-ridden, haunted by her own worldly spirits, whereas I was simply an imbecile, an inhabitant of two worlds.

Her cave overlooked the lake-ridden fen, and she usually sat, cross-legged, staring into the fire which burned incessantly. Beatrice–strange name for a witch; but she had once been beautiful.

Spectres in the Dark

The following item appeared in a Los Angeles paper, one morning in late summer:

"A murder of the most appalling and surprizing kind occurred at 333–Street late yesterday evening. The victim was Hildred Falrath, 77, a retired professor of psychology, formerly connected with the University of California. The slayer was a pupil of his, Clement Van Dorn, 33, who has, for the last few months, been in the habit of coming to Falrath's apartment at 333—Street for private instruction. The affair was particularly heinous, the aged victim having been stabbed through the arm and the breast with a dagger, while his features were terribly battered. Van Dorn, who appears to be in a dazed condition, admits the slaying but claims that the professor attacked him and that he acted only in self defense. This plea is regarded as the height of assumption, in view of the fact that Falrath has for many years been confined to a wheel chair. Van Dorn gave bail and is under surveilance."

I had settled myself comfortably with a volume of Fraser's *Golden Bough* when a loud and positive rap on my door told me that I was not to enjoy an evening alone. However, I laid the book down with no very great reluctance, for as all raps have their peculiarities, I knew that Michael Costigan craved a few hours' chat and Michael was always an interesting study.

He lumbered in, filling the room in his elephantine way, as out of place among the books, paintings and statues as a gorilla in a tea-room. He snarled something in reply to my greeting and seated himself on the edge of the largest chair he could find. There he sat silent for a moment, chafing his mallet-like hands together, his head bent between his huge shoulders. I watched him, unspeaking, taking in again the immensity of him, the primitive aura which he exuded; admiring again the great fists with their knotty, battered knuckles, the low, sloping forehead topped by a rough mass

of unkempt hair, the narrow, glinting eyes, the craggy features marked by many a heavy glove. I sat, intrigued by the workings of his heavy features as the clumsy brain sought to shape words to suit the thought.

“Say,” he spoke suddenly but gropingly as he always spoke at first. “Say, lissen, do youse believe in ghosts?”

“Ghosts?” I looked at him a moment without replying, lost in a sudden revery–ghosts; why this man himself was a ghost of mine, a spectre of my old, degenerate days, always bringing up the years of wandering and carousal and drifting.

“Ghosts?” I repeated. “Why do you ask?”

He seemed not entirely at ease. He twined his heavy fingers together and kept his gaze concentrated on his feet.

“Youse know,” he said bluntly, “youse know dat I killed Battlin’ Roike a long time ago.”

I did. I had heard the story before and I wondered at the evident connection of his remarks about ghosts, and about the long dead Rourke. I had heard him before disclaim any feelings of remorse or fear of after judgment.

“De breaks uh de game,” he expressed it. Yet now:

“Ev’body knows,” he went on slowly, “dat I had nuttin’ agin him. Roike knows dat himself.”

I wondered to hear him speak of the man in the present tense.

“No, it wuz all in de game. We had bad luck, dat wuz all, bad fer Roike an’ bad fer me. We wuz White Hopes–dat wuz de jinx–youse know.”

I tapped a finger nail on the chair arm and nodded, thinking of Stanley Ketchel, Luther McCarty, James Barry and Al Palzer, all White Hopes, touted to wrest the heavy-weight title from the great negro, Jack Johnson, and all of whom died violent deaths, at the height of their fame.

“Yeh, dat wuz it. I come up in Jeffries’ time but after I beat some good men dey began to build me fer a title match, as uh White Hope. I wuz matched wid Battlin’ Roike, another comer an’ de winner wuz tuh fight Johnson. For nineteen rounds it wuz even,” his great hands were clenched, a steely glint in his eyes as if he were again living through that terrible battle–“we wuz bot’ takin’ a lotta punishment–den we bot’

went down in de twentieth round at de same time. I got on me feet just as the referee wuz sayin’ ‘Ten!’

but Roike died dere in de ring. De breaks uh de game, dat’s wot it wuz and dat’s all. Bat Roike knows I had nuttin’ agin him and he ain’t got no reason tuh be down on me.”

The last sentence was spoken in a strangely querulous manner.

“Why should you care?” I asked in the callous manner of my earlier life. “He’s dead, isn’t he?”

“Yeh–but say, lissen. I wouldn’t say dis to anybody else, see? But you got savvy; you’re my kind, under de skin, see? You been in de gutter and you know de ropes. You know a boid like me ain’t got no more noives den uh rhino. You know I ain’t afraid uh nuttin’, don’tcha? Sure yuh do. But lissen. Somethin’

damn’ queer is goin’ on in my rooms. I’m gittin’ so’s I don’t like tuh be in de dark an’ de landlady is raisin’ Cain ’cause I leave de light on all night. Foist t’ing I saw dat wuzn’t on de up-an’-up wuz several nights ago w’en I come in me room. I tell yuh, somethin’ wuz in dere! I toined on de light an’ went t’rough de closets an’ under de bed but I didn’t find a t’ing an’ dere wuz no way for a man tuh git out without me seein’ him. I fergot it, see, but de next night it wuz de same way. Den I began to SEE things!”

“See things!” I started involuntarily. “You better lay off the booze.”

He made an impatient gesture. “Naw, ’tain’t de booze; I can’t go dis bootleg stuff an’ anyway I got outa de habit when I wuz trainin’. Jes’ de same, I see t’ings.”

“What kind of things.”

“Things.” He waved his hand in a vague manner. “I don’t jes’ see ’um, but I feel ’um.”

I regarded him with growing wonder. Hitherto imagination had formed a small part in his makeup.

“Shadows, like,” he continued, evidently at a loss to explain his exact sensations. “Stealin’ an’ slidin’

around w’en the light’s off. I can’t see ’um but I can see ’um. I know they’re there, so I’m bound tuh see

’um, ain’t I?

“Yeh, dey–or it–I don’t know which. De udder night I nearly saw ’um.” His voice sank broodingly. “I come in an’ shut de door an’ stand dere in de dark a minute, den I KNOW dat somethin’ is beside me. I let go wid me left but all I do is skin me hand an’ knock a panel outta de door. W’en I toin on de light, de room is empty. I tell yuh”–the voice sank yet lower and the wicked eyes avoided mine sullenly–“I tell yuh, either I’m bugs or Bat Roike is hauntin’ me!”

“Nonsense.” I spoke abruptly but I was conscious of a queer sensation as if a cold wind had blown upon me from a suddenly opened door. “It’s neither. You changed your habits too much; from a gregarious, restless adventurer, you’ve become almost a recluse. The change from the white lights and the clamor of the throng to a second rate boarding house and a job in a poolhall is too great. You brood too much and think too much about the past. That’s the way with you professional athletes; when you quit active competition, you forget the present entirely. Get out and tramp some more; forget Battling Rourke; change boarding places. It isn’t good for a man of your nature to think too much. You’re too much of an extrovert–if you know what that means. You need lights and crowds and fellowship, too.”

“Mebby you’re right,” he muttered. “Dis is gettin’ on me noives, sure. I been talkin’ to uh bootlegger wot wants me tuh go in wid him, woikin’ outa

Mexico; mebbe I'll take him up." Suddenly he rose abruptly.

"Gettin' late," he said shortly. A moment he turned at the door and I could have sworn I saw a gleam in his cold grey eyes–was it fear? A moment later his huge hand shut the door behind him and his footsteps died away in the distance.

The next morning my breakfast room was invaded by my closest friend, Hallworthy, and his young wife.

This young lady, a slim little twenty year old beauty, perched herself on my knee and held up a pair of rosy lips to be kissed. Her husband did not object in the least, however, because his wife happens to be my sister.

"This is a truly remarkable hour for a visit," I remarked. "How did you ever get this Young American up this early, Malcolm?"

"The most terrible thing!" the girl interrupted. "I can't imagine–"

"Let me tell it, Joan," said Hallworthy mildly. "Steve, you knew Clement Van Dorn, didn't you, and Professor Falrath?"

"I know Clement Van Dorn very intimately and have heard him speak of Falrath."

"Look here." Hallworthy laid a Los Angeles paper before me. I read the item he pointed out, attentively.

"Falrath murdered by Van Dorn, his best friend? I am surprized."

"Surprized!" exclaimed Hallworthy. "I am astounded! Nonplussed! Dumfounded! Why, outside the fact that they were the best of friends, Clement Van Dorn had the greatest abhorrence of violence that I ever saw in a man! It was almost an obsession with him! He kill a man? I don't believe it!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

“There is but a thin veneer over the savagery of all of us,” I said calmly. “I, who have seen life, both at its highest and its lowest, assure you of this. Trivial things can assume monstrous proportions and loose, for an instant, the primal savage, roaring and red handed. I have seen a man kill his best friend over a checker game. Men are only men and the primitive, monstrous instincts still hold sway in the dim corners of the mind.”

“Not among men like Van Dorn,” Hallworthy dissented. “Why, Steve, Clement is positively bloodless in his erudition. He was out of his element anywhere but in Greenwich Village, where he was an authority on the most pallid form of vers libre and cubist art.”

“I agree with Malcolm,” said Joan, taking his arm, her protective feminism uppermost. “I don’t believe Clement killed him.”

“We shall soon know,” I answered. “We’re going to see Clement.”

This necessitated a trip to the prison, for Van Dorn’s bail had been remanded and he was being held for trial. Van Dorn, a slim, pallid youth with delicate and refined features, paced his cell and gesticulated jerkily with his slender, artistic hands as he talked. His hair was tousled, his eyes bloodshot; he was unshaven. His universe had crashed about him; his standards were upset. He had lost his mental equilibrium. Looking at him, I felt that if he were not already insane, that he was hovering on the verge of insanity.

“No, no, no!” he kept exclaiming. “I don’t understand it! It’s monstrous, a terrible nightmare! They say I murdered him–that’s preposterous! How do they account for the fact that when we were found his body was clear across the room from his wheel chair?”

“Tell us the whole thing, old fellow,” Hallworthy’s voice came, soothing, calm. “We’re your friends, you know, and we will believe you.”

“Yes, tell us, Clement,” echoed Joan, her large eyes tender with pity for the wretched youth.

Van Dorn pressed his hands to his temples as if to still their throbbing, his face twisted in mental torment.

“This is the way of it,” he said haltingly. “I’ve told this tale over and over but no one believes me. I’ve been going up to Professor Falrath’s apartment nearly every night for the past week and he was explaining Spencer’s principles, the deeper phases of them. I never saw a man who possessed such a store of metaphysical learning, or who had gone deeper into the roots of things in general. Why, there never were two greater friends. That night we were sitting and talking as we had been and I stepped over to a table to get a book. When I turned”–he closed his eyes tightly, shook his head as if to rid himself of some inner vision, then stared fixedly at us, his hands clenched–“when I turned, Professor Falrath was rising out of his chair; that in itself was astonishing, because he hasn’t left the chair in years, but his face held me in frozen silence. My God, that face!” He shuddered violently. “There was no likeness of Professor Falrath, no HUMAN likeness in those frightful features! It was as if Falrath had vanished and in his place sat a horrid Spectre from some other sphere. The Thing leaped from the chair and hurled itself toward me, fingers stretched like claws. I screamed and fled toward the door but it was in front of me; it closed in on me and in desperation I fought back. Violence of any sort has always repelled me; I have always looked upon the exercize of physical force as a return to bestiality. As for killing, the very sight of blood from a cut finger always nauseated me. But now, I was no longer a civilized man, but a wild beast fighting frenziedly for life. Falrath tore my clothing to pieces and his nails left long tears in my skin; I struck him again and again in the face but without effect.

“At last I secured–how I know not for all is a scarlet haze of horror–a dagger which was one of his collection of arms–this I drove through his wrist and the start of the blood weakened and revolted me.

Yet, as he still pressed his attack, I steeled myself and thrust it through his bosom. He fell dead and I, too, fell in a dead faint.”

We were silent for a time following this weird narration.

“We’ve stayed our limit, Clement,” I said presently. “We will have to go, but rest assured that you will receive all the aid possible. The only solution I can see, is that Professor Falrath was the victim of a sudden homicidal insanity, which might have temporarily overcome his physical weaknesses as you say.”

Clement nodded but there was no spark of hope in his eyes, only a bleak and baffled despair. He was not suited to cope with the rough phases of life, which until now he had never encountered. A weakling, morally and physically, he was learning in a hard school that savage fact of biology–that only the strong survive.

Suddenly Joan held out her arms to him, her mothering instinct which all women have touched to the quick by his helplessness. Like a lost child he threw himself on his knees before her, laid his head in her lap, his frail body racked with great sobs as she stroked his hair, whispering gently to him–like a mother to her child. His hands sought hers and held them as if they were his hope of salvation. The poor devil; he had no place in this rough world; he was made to be mothered and cared for by women–like so many others of his kind.

There were tears in Joan’s eyes as we came out of the cell and Hallworthy’s face showed that he too had been deeply touched.

I had learned that a detective had been put to work on the case–rather an unusual procedure since Van Dorn had confessed to the killing, but the object was to find the motive.

The detective working on the case gave his views as follows: “Van Dorn is just bugs, I figure. One of these fellows that was born half cookoo and completed the job by hanging around such crazy places as Greenwich Village where they’re all crazy and liable to kill anybody just for the sensation.” (Evidently his knowledge of artists and the New Thought was gathered from ten-cent movies.) “He and the old professor must have had a row and he killed Falrath, dragged his body across the room, tore his own clothes and then lay down and pretended to be in a faint when the people, who had heard the noise, come busting in at the door. That’s the way I think

it was. Must have been a terrible thing, Falrath's face was twisted all out of shape; didn't scarcely look like a human."

"What do you think?" asked Hallworthy as we were on our way back.

"I think what I said to Van Dorn. That Clement is telling the truth and that Falrath was insane."

"Yet, could even violent insanity cause a man of Falrath's age and disability to spring on and nearly kill a younger man with his bare hands? Could insanity have put strength in those shrivelled muscles and bloodless tissues which had refused to even support his frail body for so many years?"

"That–or else Van Dorn is lying or insane himself," I answered, and for a time the conversation was dropped. Van Dorn had plenty of money and at the time I could see no way in which we could aid him.

At the trial something might come up.

That night as I turned out the light, preparatory to retiring, I had an opportunity to observe the power of thought suggestion. Michael Costigan's tale had been revolving in the back of my mind and as I plunged the room in darkness, I smiled to myself at the hint of movement in the shadows about me, which my vivid imagination created.

"Suicide follows sudden attack of insanity. The people of a boarding house on–Street were last night roused by a terrific commotion going on in an upstairs room, and upon investigation found Michael Costigan, ex-prizefighter, engaged in a debauchery of destruction, smashing chairs and tables and tearing the doors from their hinges, in the darkness of his room. A light being turned on, Costigan, a man of huge frame and remarkable strength, stopped short in what was apparently a battle with figments of his imagination, stared wildly at the astounded watchers, then suddenly snatched a revolver from the hand of the landlady and placing the muzzle against his breast, fired four shots into his body, dying almost instantly. The theory advanced is that Costigan was a victim of delirium tremens, but he was not known to be a drinking man. The landlady maintains that he was insane, and asserts that he had been talking strangely for some time."

Laying down the paper in which I had read the above article, I gave myself over to musing. This indeed was unusual. Had Costigan's obsession of Battling Rourke's ghost driven him to suicide or was this obsession merely one of the incidents of a latent insanity which had finally destroyed him? This seemed more likely; a man like Costigan was not one to kill himself because of a fancied "ghost" even though he had confessed to a partial belief in its existence. Moreover, considering the terrible punishment he had received in his years in the ring, it was likely that his mentality had been affected.

I picked up the paper and idly scanned the columns, glancing over the usual lists of murders and assaults, which seemed extraordinarily numerous, somehow.

Later in the day I paid a visit to the Hallworthys who lived not overly far from my apartments. I could tell that their minds were still running on Van Dorn and deliberately steered all talk into other channels.

I leaned back in my easy chair regarding the two who sat on a lounge before me. Malcolm Hallworthy was such a man as I had always hoped my sister would marry; a kind man, kind almost to a fault, generous and gentle, yet not weak like Van Dorn. He was not many years older than Joan but he seemed so because of his indulgently protecting attitude, yet at times they seemed like happy children together.

This attitude was shown in his unconscious posture, an arm about the girl's slim body as she nestled against him. My only doubt was that he was too indulgent. She was a willful, reckless sort of a girl, not old enough to have any judgment, and she needed, at times, a strong hand to guide her.

"How do you manage this little spit-fire, Malcolm?" I asked bluntly.

He smiled and gently caressed her curls.

"Love will tame the wildest, Steve."

"I doubt if love alone will tame a woman," I answered. "Before she married she could be a little wildcat when she wanted to. The first thing you know

you'll let her have her way so much that you'll spoil her."

"You talk as if I were a child," Joan pouted.

"You are. I warn you, Malcolm, her mother gave her her last spanking when she was seventeen."

A shadow touched Hallworthy's fine, sensitive features.

"That's never necessary. Punishing a child is simply brutal–that's all. A relic of the Stone Age that should have no place in the twentieth century. Nothing revolts me quite as much as someone coercing a weaker mortal by the ancient tyranny of flogging."

I laughed. Long roaming in the by-ways of the world had calloused me to many things. I could scarcely get Hallworthy's viewpoint on some subjects; Joan's either, for that matter. Though we were brother and sister, yet our lives, until recent years had been as different as the poles. She had been raised in luxury, but I had wandered forth into the world at the age of eight and some of the things I had seen and the ways I had travelled had not been of the nicest.

"Many things may not be right," I said. "But they are necessary."

"I deny that!" exclaimed Hallworthy. "Wrong is never necessary! The rightness of a thing makes it necessary, just as wrongness makes it unnecessary."

"Wait!" I raised a hand. "You think, then, if a thing is Right, it should be done, no matter if the consequences are bad."

"The consequences of Right are never bad."

"You are a hopeless idealist. According to your theory, all knowledge gained by research should be given to the people, since it is certainly Wrong to keep the race in ignorance?"

"Certainly. You seem to believe that the end makes things right or wrong. I believe that everything is fundamentally right or wrong and that nothing can

make for good results but right."

"Wait. You forget that the great host of people cannot even assimilate such knowledge as has been gained through the past centuries. Suppose hypnotism were a proven fact; would it be right to give to all people the power of controlling others?"

"Yes, if it were a proven fact. It is wrong to suppress knowledge, therefore it is right to dispense knowledge and the results would be good."

That evening I visited Professor Falrath's apartments. I had gotten permission to do so, with the intention of going through his papers to see if any light could be thrown on the murder, or his past relations with Van Dorn.

Among them I found the following letter which he had evidently never finished; it was addressed to Professor Hjalmar Nordon, Brooklyn, New York, and the part which caught my attention follows:

"For the last few nights I have been the victim of a peculiar hallucination. After I turn out the light, I seem to sense the presence of something in my room. There is a suggestion of movement in the darkness and straining my eyes it sometimes seems as though I can almost see vague and intangible shadows which glide about through the darkness. Yet, I know that I cannot see these things, as one sees a physical object; I feel them, somehow, and the sensation is so realistic that they seem to register themselves on my sight and hearing. I cannot understand this. Can it be that I am losing my mind? As yet I have said nothing to anyone, but tonight when Van Dorn comes here, I shall tell him of this illusion and see if he can offer any logical explanation."

Here the letter ended abruptly. I re-read it, again conscious of that strange feeling of an unknown door opening somewhere and letting in the dank air of outer spaces.

This was monstrously strange. Michael Costigan and Hildred Falrath had been as far apart as the poles, yet here seemed a common thought between them. Costigan, too, had spoken of shadows lurking and gliding about his

room, and the strange thing, each had spoken of FEELING the presence of the spectres. Each had impressed the fact that the Things were unseeable and unhearable, yet each spoke vaguely of SEEING and HEARING.

I took the letter to my rooms, and composed a letter to Professor Nordon, narrating the whole affair and telling him of the letter, explaining that I did not enclose for the reason that it might be of use in Van Dorn's trial to prove the friendship existing between him and the late professor.

This done, I went out into the warm star-light of the late summer night for a stroll, feeling fagged somehow, though I had done nothing to justify such a feeling. As I went along the poorly lighted and almost deserted street–for it was late–I was aware of the strange actions of an individual just in front of me. His progress seemed to be measured by the areas of street lights. He would hesitate beneath the glow of a light, then suddenly dart swiftly along the street until he came to another light, where he would halt as if loath to leave its radiance.

Feeling some interest, I hastened my step and soon overtook him, for in spite of his haste between the lamp posts, his lingering beneath them made his progress very slow. He was standing directly beneath one, staring this way and that, when I came up behind him and spoke to him. He whirled, hand clenched and raised and struck wildly at me. I blocked the blow easily and caught his arm, supposing he thought I was a foot-pad. However, the evident terror on his face seemed abnormal, somehow. His eyes bulged and his mouth gaped while his complexion was as near white as the human skin can become.

Yet before I could explain my honest intentions, he breathed a gusty sigh.

"Ah, you; pardon me, mister. I thought–I thought it–it was somethin' else."

"What's up?" I asked, bluntly curious.

He shuffled his feet and lowered his eyes, in a manner that reminded me strangely of Costigan's attitude.

“Nothin’,” he said rather sullenly, then modified the statement. “That is–I dunno. I’ll tell you somethin’, though,” his face took on an air of low cunning. “Stay in the light and you’ll be alright. They won’t come out of the dark, not Them!”

“They? Who are They?”

At this moment, just as his lips were opening to reply, the street light beneath which we stood gave a flicker as though about to go out, and with a scream, the man turned and fled up the street, his frantic heels drumming a receding tattoo on the sidewalk.

Completely dumfounded, I continued my stroll and returned to my apartments, wondering idly at the number of lights burning in so many houses at such a late hour.

Again at my apartments I settled myself for an hour or so of reading. Selecting a work expounding material monism, I made myself comfortable and upon opening the pages, was reminded, by contrast, of Malcolm Hallworthy and his extreme idealism. I smiled and reflected:

“Maybe Joan hasn’t a husband who will control her as she needs to be, but at least she is married to a man who will never mistreat her.”

At that very instant there sounded a scurry of feminine high heels outside, the door was hurled open and a girl staggered into the room and threw herself panting into my arms.

“Joan! What in God’s name–”

“Steve!” It was the wail of a frightened and abused child. “Malcolm beat me!”

“Nonsense.” If she had grown wings and flown before my eyes, I could not have been more dumfounded. “What are you talking about, child?”

“He did, he did!” she wailed, sobbing and clinging tightly to me. Her curls were disheveled, her clothing disarranged. “I went to sleep on the lounge

and when I woke up, he had me bound there by my wrists and was flogging me with a riding whip! Look!" With a whimper she slipped the flimsy fabric from her back and I saw long, ugly red weals across her slim shoulders.

"You see?"

"Yes, but I don't understand. Why, he thought it was brutal to spank you."

The House

"And so you see," said my friend James Conrad, his pale, keen face alight, "why I am studying the strange case of Justin Geoffrey–seeking to find, either in his own life, or in his family line, the reason for his divergence from the family type. I am trying to discover just what made Justin the man he was."

"Have you met with success?" I asked. "I see you have procured not only his personal history but his family tree. Surely, with your deep knowledge of biology and psychology, you can explain this strange poet, Geoffrey."

Conrad shook his head, a baffled look in his scintillant eyes. "I admit I cannot understand it. To the average man, there would appear to be no mystery–Justin Geoffrey was simply a freak, half genius, half maniac. He would say that he 'just happened' in the same manner in which he would attempt to explain the crooked growth of a tree. But twisted minds are no more causeless than twisted trees. There is always a reason–and save for one seemingly trivial incident I can find no reason for Justin's life, as he lived it.

"He was a poet. Trace the lineage of any rhymer you wish, and you will find poets or musicians among his ancestors. But I have studied his family tree back for five hundred years and find neither poet nor singer, nor any thing that might suggest there had ever been one in the Geoffrey family. They are people of good blood, but of the most staid and prosaic type you could find. Originally an old English family of the country squire class, who became impoverished and came to America to rebuild their fortunes, they settled in New York in 1690 and though their descendants have

scattered over the country, all–save Justin alone–have remained much of a type–sober, industrious merchants. Both of his parents are of this class, and likewise his brothers and sisters. His brother John is a successful banker in Cincinnati. Eustace is the junior partner of a law firm in New York, and William, the younger brother, is in his junior year in Harvard, already showing the ear-marks of a successful bond salesman. Of the three sisters of Justin, one is married to the dullest business man imaginable, one is a teacher in a grade school and the other graduates from Vassar this year. Not one of them shows the slightest sign of the characteristics which marked Justin. He was like a stranger, an alien among them. They are all known as kindly, honest people.

Granted; but I found them intolerably dull and apparently entirely without imagination. Yet Justin, a man of their own blood and flesh, dwelt in a world of his own making, a world so fantastic and utterly bizarre that it was quite outside and beyond my own gropings–and I have never been accused of a lack of imagination.

“Justin Geoffrey died raving in a madhouse, just as he himself had often predicted. This was enough to explain his mental wanderings to the average man; to me it is only the beginning of the question. What drove Justin Geoffrey mad? Insanity is either acquired or inherited. In his case it was certainly not inherited. I have proved that to my own satisfaction. As far back as the records go, no man, woman or child in the Geoffrey family has ever showed the slightest taint of a diseased mind. Justin, then, acquired his lunacy. But how? No disease made him what he was; he was unusually healthy, like all his family. His people said he had never been sick a day in his life. There were no abnormalities present at birth. Now comes the strange part. Up to the age of ten he was no whit different from his brothers. When he was ten, the change came over him.

“He began to be tortured by wild and fearful dreams which occurred almost nightly and which continued until the day of his death. As we know, instead of fading as most dreams of childhood do, these dreams increased in vividness and terror, until they shadowed his whole life. Toward the last, they merged so terribly with his waking thoughts that they seemed grisly

realities and his dying shrieks and blasphemies shocked even the hardened keepers of the madhouse.

“Coincidental with these dreams came a drawing away from his companions and his own family. From a completely extrovert, gregarious little animal he became almost a recluse. He wandered by himself more than is good for a child and he preferred to do his roaming at night. Mrs. Geoffrey has told how time and again she would come into the room where he and his brother Eustace slept, after they had gone to bed, to find Eustace sleeping peacefully, but the open window telling her of Justin’s departure. The lad would be out under the stars, pushing his way through the silent willows along some sleeping river, or wading through the dew-wet grass, or rousing the drowsy cattle in some quiet meadow by his passing.

“This is a stanza of a poem Justin wrote at the age of eleven.” Conrad took up a volume published by a very exclusive house and read:

Behind the Veil, what gulfs of Time and Space?

What blinking, mowing things to blast the sight?

I shrink before a vague, colossal Face

Born in the mad immensities of Night.

“What!” I exclaimed. “Do you mean to tell me that a boy of eleven wrote those lines?”

“I most certainly do! His poetry at that age was crude and groping, but it showed even then sure promise of the mad genius that was later to blaze forth from his pen. In another family, he had certainly been encouraged and had blossomed forth as an infant prodigy. But his unspeakably prosaic family saw in his scribbling only a waste of time and an abnormality which they thought they must nip in the bud. Bah! Dam up the abhorrent black rivers that run blindly through the African jungles! But they did prevent him giving his unusual talents full swing for a space, and it was not until he was seventeen that his poems were first given to the world, by the aid of a friend

who discovered him struggling and starving in Greenwich Village, whither he had fled from the stifling environments of his home.

“But the abnormalities which his family thought they saw in his poetry were not those which I see. To them, anyone who does not make his living by selling potatoes is abnormal. They sought to discipline his poetic leanings out of him, and his brother John bears a scar to this day, a memento of the day he sought in a big-brotherly way to chastise his younger brother for neglecting some work for his scribbling. Justin’s temper was sudden and terrible; his whole disposition was as different from his stolid, good-natured people as a tiger differs from oxen. Nor does he favor them, save in a vague way about the features.

They are round-faced, stocky, inclined to portliness. He was thin almost to emaciation, with a narrow-bridged nose and a face like a hawk’s. His eyes blazed with an inner passion and his tousled black hair fell over a brow strangely narrow. That forehead of his was one of his unpleasant features. I cannot say why, but I never glanced at that pale, high, narrow forehead that I did not unconsciously suppress a shudder!

“And as I said, all this change came after he was ten. I have seen a picture taken of him and his brothers when he was nine, and I had some difficulty in picking him out from them. He had the same stubby build, the same round, dull, good-natured face. One would think a changeling had been substituted for Justin Geoffrey at the age of ten!”

I shook my head in puzzlement and Conrad continued.

“All the children except Justin went through high school and entered college. Justin finished high school much against his will. He differed from his brothers and sisters in this as in all other things. They worked industriously in school but outside they seldom opened a book. Justin was a tireless searcher for knowledge, but it was knowledge of his own choosing. He despised and detested the courses of education given in school and repeatedly condemned the triviality and uselessness of such education.

“He refused point blank to go to college. At the time of his death at the age of twenty-one, he was curiously unbalanced. In many ways he was

abysmally ignorant. For instance he knew nothing whatever of the higher mathematics and he swore that of all knowledge this was the most useless, for, far from being the one solid fact in the universe, he contended that mathematics were the most unstable and unsure. He knew nothing of sociology, economics, philosophy or science. He never kept himself posted on current events and he knew no more of modern history than he had learned in school. But he did know ancient history, and he had a great store of ancient magic, Kirowan.

“He was interested in ancient languages and was perversely stubborn in his use of obsolete words and archaic phrases. Now how, Kirowan, did this comparatively uncultured youth, with no background of literary heredity behind him, manage to create such horrific images as he did?”

“Why,” said I, “poets feel–they write from instinct rather than knowledge. A great poet may be a very ignorant man in other ways, and have no real concrete knowledge on his own poetic subjects. Poetry is a weave of shadows–impressions cast on the consciousness which cannot be described otherwise.”

“Exactly!” Conrad snapped. “And whence came these impressions to Justin Geoffrey? Well, to continue, the change in Justin began when he was ten years old. His dreams seem to date from a night he spent near an old deserted farm house. His family were visiting some friends who lived in a small village in New York State–up close to the foot of the Catskills. Justin, I gather, went fishing with some other boys, strayed away from them, got lost and was found by the searchers next morning slumbering peacefully in the grove which surrounds the house. With the characteristic stolidity of the Geoffreys, he had been unshaken by an experience which would have driven many a small boy into hysteria. He merely said that he had wandered over the countryside until he came to this house and being unable to get in, had slept among the trees, it being late in the summer. Nothing had frightened him, but he said that he had had strange and extraordinary dreams which he could not describe but which had seemed strangely vivid at the time. This alone was unusual–the Geoffreys were no more troubled with nightmares than a hog is.

“But Justin continued to dream wildly and strangely and as I said, to change in thoughts, ideas and demeanor. Evidently, then, it was that incident which made him what he was. I wrote to the mayor of the village asking him if there was any legend connected with the house but his reply, while arousing my interest, told me nothing. He merely said that the house had been there ever since anyone could remember, but had been unoccupied for at least fifty years. He said the ownership was in some dispute, and he added that, strange to say, the place had always been known merely as The House by the people of Old Dutchtown. He said that so far as he knew, no unsavory tales were connected with it, and he sent me a Kodak snapshot of it.”

Here Conrad produced a small print and held it up for me to see. I sprang up, almost startled.

“That? Why, Conrad, I’ve seen that same landscape before–those tall sombre oaks, with the castle-like house half concealed among them–I’ve got it! It’s a painting by Humphrey Skuyler, hanging in the art gallery of the Harlequin Club.”

“Indeed!” Conrad’s eyes lighted up. “Why, both of us know Skuyler well. Let’s go up to his studio and ask him what he knows about The House, if anything.”

We found the artist hard at work as usual, on a bizarre subject. As he was fortunate in being of a very wealthy family, he was able to paint for his own enjoyment–and his tastes ran to the weird and outre. He was not a man who affected unusual dress and manners, but he looked the temperamental artist. He was about my height, some five feet and ten inches, but he was slim as a girl with long white nervous fingers, a knife-edge face and a shock of unruly hair tumbling over a high pale forehead.

“The House, yes, yes,” he said in his quick, jerky manner, “I painted it. I was looking on a map one day and the name Old Dutchtown intrigued me. I went up there hoping for some subjects, but I found nothing in the town. I did find that old house several miles out.”

“I wondered, when I saw the painting,” I said, “why you merely painted a deserted house without the usual accompaniment of ghastly faces peering

out of the upstairs windows or misshapen shapes roosting on the gables."

"No?" he snapped. "And didn't anything about the mere picture impress you?"

"Yes, it did," I admitted. "It made me shudder."

"Exactly!" he cried. "To have elaborated the painting with figures from my own paltry brain would have spoiled the effect. The effect of horror is most gained when the sensation is most intangible. To put the horror into a visible shape, no matter how gibbous or mistily, is to lessen the effect. I paint an ordinary tumble-down farmhouse with the hint of a ghastly face at a window; but this house–this House–needs no such mummery or charlatanry. It fairly exudes an aura of abnormality–that is, to a man sensitive to such impressions."

Conrad nodded. "I received that impression from the snapshot. The trees obscure much of the building but the architecture seems very unfamiliar to me."

"I should say so. I'm not altogether unversed in the history of architecture and I was unable to classify it.

The natives say it was built by the Dutch who first settled that part of the country but the style is no more Dutch than it's Greek. There's something almost Oriental about the thing, and yet it's not that either. At any rate, it's old–that cannot be denied."

"Did you go in The House?"

"I did not. The doors and windows were locked and I had no desire to commit burglary. It hasn't been long since I was prosecuted by a crabbed old farmer in Vermont for forcing my way into an old deserted house of his in order to paint the interior."

"Will you go with me to Old Dutchtown?" asked Conrad suddenly.

Skuyler smiled. “I see your interest is aroused–yes, if you think you can get us into The House without having us dragged up in court afterwards. I have an eccentric reputation enough as it is; a few more suits like the one I mentioned and I’ll be looked on as a complete lunatic. And what about you, Kirowan?”

“Of course I’ll go,” I answered.

“I was sure of that,” said Conrad. “I don’t even bother to ask him to accompany me on my weird explorations any more–I know he’s eager as I.”

And so we came to Old Dutchtown on a warm late summer morning.

“Drowsy and dull with age the houses blink,

On aimless streets that youthfulness forget–

But what time-grisly figures glide and slink

Down the old alleys when the moon has set?”

Thus Conrad quoted the phantasies of Justin Geoffrey as we looked down on the slumbering village of Old Dutchtown from the hill over which the road passed before descending into the crooked dusty streets.

“Do you suppose he had this town in mind when he wrote that?”

“It fits the description, doesn’t it–‘High gables of an earlier, ruder age’–look–there are your Dutch houses and old Colonial buildings–I can see why you were attracted by this town, Skuyler, it breathes a very musk of antiquity. Some of those houses are three hundred years old. And what an atmosphere of decadence hovers over the whole town.”

We were met by the mayor of the place, a man whose up-to-the-minute clothes and manners contrasted strangely with the sleepiness of the town and the slow, easy-going ways of most of the natives. He remembered Skuyler’s visit there–indeed, the coming of any stranger into this little backwash town was an event to be remembered by the inhabitants. It

seemed strange to think that within a hundred or so miles there roared and throbbed the greatest metropolis of the world.

Conrad could not wait a moment, so the mayor accompanied us to The House. The first glance of it sent a shudder of repulsion through me. It stood in the midst of a sort of upland, between two fertile farms, the stone fences of which ran to within a hundred or so yards on either side. A ring of tall, gnarled oaks entirely surrounded the house, which glimmered through their branches like a bare and time-battered skull.

“Who owns this land?” the artist asked.

“Why, the title is in some dispute,” answered the mayor. “Jediah Alders owns that farm there, and Squire Abner owns the other. Abner claims The House is part of the Alders farm, and Jediah is just as loud in his assertions that the Squire’s grandfather bought it from the Dutch family who first owned it.”

“That sounds backwards,” commented Conrad. “Each one denies ownership.”

“That’s not so strange,” said Skuyler. “Would you want a place like that to be part of your estate?”

“No,” said Conrad after a moment’s silent contemplation, “I would not.”

“Between ourselves,” broke in the mayor, “neither of the farmers want to pay the taxes on the property as the land about it is absolutely useless. The barrenness of the soil extends for some little distance in all directions and the seed planted close to those stone fences on both farms yields little. These oak trees seem to sap the very life of the soil.”

“Why have the trees not been cut down?” asked Conrad. “I have never encountered any sentiment among the farmers of this state.”

“Why, as the ownership has been in dispute for the past fifty years, no one has liked to take it on himself.

And then the trees are so old and of such sturdy growth it would entail a great deal of labor. And there is a foolish superstition attached to that grove–a long time ago a man was badly cut by his own axe, trying to chop down one of the trees–an accident that might occur anywhere–and the villagers attached over-much importance to the incident."

"Well," said Conrad, "if the land about The House is useless, why not rent the building itself, or sell it?"

For the first time the mayor looked embarrassed.

"Why, none of the villagers would rent or buy it, as no good land goes with it, and to tell you the truth, it has been found impossible to enter The House!"

"Impossible?"

"Well," he amended, "the doors and windows are heavily barred and bolted, and either the keys are in possession of someone who does not care to divulge the secret, or else they have been lost. I have thought that possibly someone was using The House for a bootleg den and had a reason for keeping the curious out but no light has ever been seen there, and no one is ever seen slinking about the place."

We had passed through the circling ring of sullen oaks and stood before the building.

Untitled Fragment

Beneath the glare of the sun, etched in the hot blue sky, native laborers sweated and toiled. The scene was a cameo of desolation–blue sky, amber sand stretching to the skyline in all directions, barely relieved by a fringe of palm trees that marked an oasis in the near distance. The men were like brown ants in that empty sun-washed immensity, pecking away at a queer grey dome half hidden in the sands. Their employers aided with directions and ready hands.

Allison was square-built and black bearded; Brill was tall, wiry, with a ginger-hued moustache and cold blue eyes. Both had the hard bronzed look of men who had spent most of their lives in the outlands.

Allison knocked out the ashes from his pipe on his boot heel.

“Well, how about it?”

“You mean that fool bet?” Brill looked at him in surprise. “Do you mean it?”

“I do. I’ll lay you my best six-shooter against your saddle that we don’t find an Egyptian in this tomb.”

“What do you expect to find?” asked Brill quizzically, “a local shaykh? Or maybe a Hyksos king? I’ll admit it’s different from anything of the sort I’ve ever seen before, but we know from its appearance of age that it antedates Turkish or Semitic control of Egypt–it’s bound to go back further than the Hyksos, even. And before them, who was in Egypt?”

“I reckon we’ll know after we’ve looted this tomb,” answered Allison, with a certain grimness in his manner.

Brill laughed. “You mean to tell me you think there was a race here before the Egyptians, civilized enough to build such a tomb as this? I suppose you think they built the pyramids!”

“They did,” was the imperturbable reply.

Brill laughed. “Now you’re trying to pull my leg.”

Allison looked at him curiously. “Did you ever read the ‘Unausprechlichen Kulten’?”

“What the devil’s that?”

“A book called ‘Nameless Cults,’ by a crazy German named Von Junzt–at least they said he was crazy.

Among other things he wrote of an age which he swore he had discovered–a sort of historical blind spot.

He called it the Hyborian Age. We have guessed what came before, and we know what came after, but that age itself has been a blank space–no legends, no chronicles, just a few scattered names that came to be applied in other senses.

“It’s our lack of knowledge about this age that upsets our calculations and makes us put down Atlantis as a myth. This is what Von Junzt says: That when Atlantis, Lemuria and other nations of that age were destroyed by a violent cataclysm–except for scattered remnants here and there–the continent now known as Africa was untouched, though connected with the other continent. A tribe of savages fled to the arctic circle to escape the volcanoes, and eventually evolved into a race known as Hyborians. These reached a high stage of civilization and dominated the western part of the world, all except this particular part. A pre-Cataclysmic race lived here, known as Stygians. It was from them that the Grecian legend of Stygia arose; the Nile was the Styx of the fables. The Hyborians were never able to invade Stygia, and last they themselves were destroyed by waves of barbarians from the north–our own ancestors. In Stygia the ruling classes were pure-blooded, but the lower classes were mixed–Stygian, Semitic and Hyborian blood.

“In the southward drift of the barbarians, a tribe of red-haired Nordics fought their way south and overthrew the ancient Stygian regime. They destroyed or drove out the pure-blooded Stygians, and set themselves up as a ruling caste, eventually being absorbed by their subjects; from these adventurers and the mixed up mongrel lower classes came the Egyptians. It was the Stygians who built the pyramids and the Sphinx. And if I’m not mistaken, one of them lies in this pile of masonry.”

Brill laughed incredulously.

Appendix

NOTES ON THE ORIGINAL HOWARD TEXTS

The texts for this edition of *The Horror Stories of Robert E. Howard* were prepared by Rusty Burke and Rob Roehm, with the assistance of Paul Herman. The stories have been checked either against Howard's original manuscripts and typescripts, copies of which were provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation and Glenn Lord; Lord's transcriptions of Howard's originals; or the first published appearance if a manuscript, typescript, or transcription was unavailable. Every effort has been made to present the work of Robert E. Howard as faithfully as possible.

Deviations from the original sources are detailed in these textual notes. In the following notes, page, line, and word numbers are given as follows: 11.20.2, indicating page 11, twentieth line, second word. Story titles, chapter numbers and titles, and breaks before and after chapter headings, titles, and illustrations are not counted; in poems, only text lines are counted. The page/line number will be followed by the reading in the original source, or a statement indicating the type of change made.

We have standardized chapter numbering and titling: Howard's own practices varied, as did those of the publications in which these stories appeared. We have not noted those changes here.

In the Forest of Villefère

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, August 1925. No changes have been made for this edition.

A Song of the Werewolf Folk

Text taken from Glenn Lord's transcription of Howard's original typescript. No changes have been made for this edition.

Wolfshead

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, April 1926. 6.1.2: your; 7.15.8: semicolon after "age" 9.33.4: comma after "myself" 12.35.4: single quote after "von Schiller?" 14.29.6-14: no quotation marks; 15.40.16: no comma after "floor" 22.28.7-8: "as" not in original, "if" repeated *Up, John Kane!*

Text taken from Glenn Lord’s transcription of Howard’s original typescript. No changes have been made for this edition.

Remembrance

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, April 1928. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Dream Snake

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, February 1928. 32.14.8: the *Sea Curse*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, May 1928. 39.40.14: “of” not in original *The Moor Ghost*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, September 1929. No changes have been made for this edition.

Moon Mockery

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, April 1929. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Little People

Text taken from a copy of Howard’s original typescript, provided by Glenn Lord. The story was originally untitled. The typescript is unusual in having holographic additions and corrections, in addition to Howard’s more frequent practice of typing such insertions. Because Howard’s handwriting can be exceptionally difficult, some of the readings are conjectural, as is the placement of some inserted material.

At least one page is missing from the typescript. [A facsimile of the original typescript is included in *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King* (Del Rey, 2005).] 43.3.3: she,; 43.8.6: This; 43.9.6: answered,; 43.10.6-9:

“as an exponent” is hand-written above the original “to expound”, “of” not in manuscript; 43.12.3: fetched.; 43.12.8: “finallity” hand-written above

original “positiveness” 43.12.10: seventeen,; 43.15.7: fact.; 43.15.9: said,; 43.16.11: exclaimed,; 43.18.9: nettled,; 43.19.7: were; 43.21.2: “brotherly”

hand-written above “frown” 44.5.3-8: “A race of small, dark people.” hand-written above “Traces of their type may be” with no indication of intended insertion point; 44.5.9: Traces; 44.7.7: “Lapps”

hand-written next to typed “Laps” 44.11.10: “by” not in manuscript; 44.21.6: ago.; 44.21.11: interest,; 44.23.7: havent; 44.25.3: original had “dolmens”, crossed out in pencil, “menhirs” written above; 44.27.1: Maybe.; 44.27.11: “villager” hand-written above original “fellow” 44.28.1-2: “the warning”

handwritten in margin after “said”, no dash; 44.28.14: Youre; 44.29.1: no comma after “sophisticated”

44.29.8: wouldnt; 44.31.11-12: “and combat” hand-written after “interest.” 44.32.5: exclaimed,; 44.33.7: didnt; 44.36.3: wont; 44.36.4: either.; 44.36.6: vetoed,; 44.37.12-14: original had “true”, crossed out in pencil, “up to date” hand-written above; 44.38.2-3: original had “New Age”, crossed out in pencil, “Younger Generation” hand-written above; 44.39.2: havent; 44.39.10: night.; 44.39.12: answered,; 45.1.4: wouldnt; 45.2.5: you.; 45.2.6-9: “to be out unprotected.”” handwritten following

“you.”” 45.4.1: No quotation mark before “I” 45.4.3: youre; 45.4.5: foolish.; 45.5.14: no comma after

“I” 45.9.7: framing,; 45.14.1: wouldnt; 45.17.7: willfull; 45.19.2: cant; 45.19.5: around.; 45.19.7: flamed,; 45.19.12: original had “restrain”, “bully” hand-written above; 45.21.3: necessary.; 45.21.5: sighed,; 45.25.3: didnt; 45.25.8: anyhow.; 45.28.1: original had “bully”, crossed out and “cajole”

hand-written above; 45.31.1: no period after “corridor” 45.34.8: gristly; 45.35.6-10: “and the air was warm” is typed in above “yet the whole landscape” without indication of the intended insertion point; 45.36.1: LOOKED; 45.36.6-11: original had “Across the I rise,” “fen” and “saw” are hand-written above; 45.37.9: original had “ruined Cromlech”, “ed” of

“ruined” crossed out, “s” inserted after “ruin”, and “Cromlech” crossed out; 46.2.3-6: original had “She disliked compulsory obeidience extremely.”,

“Compulsory obeidence was repugnant” hand-written above; 46.4.12: “I” hand-written above “lay”

46.5.2-3: “brooding and” typed in above “staring at the” with no indication of intended insertion point; 46.9.8: original had “lurking”, crossed out and “impending” hand-written above; 46.10.9: conciousness; 46.11.12: “through” is typed above “into the window” 46.13.7: arrouse; 46.15.3-4: originally “strange thoughts”, “strange” is crossed out in pencil, “partly formed” typed above “thoughts”, then “formed” is crossed out and a word that may be “remembered” is written above, but the reading is conjectural; 46.15.11: awke; 46.25.7: original had “cromlech”, crossed out and “ruins” hand-written above; 46.25.13: no comma after “moon” 46.26.5: comma rather than dash after “length” 46.28.10: original had

“in”, “within” hand-written above; 46.29.11: original had “hastened”, “quickened” typed above; 46.31.9: eveil; 46.32.1: no comma after “Then” 46.33.4-8: original had “limned the scene clearly”, crossed out and “flung a veil of illusion” hand-written above; 46.39.6: SAW; 46.40.17-41.1: original read “I saw that on three sides she was surrounded–they…”, “on” through “surrounded” is crossed out in pencil; 46.41.8: After “me.”, the following sentence originally began “Only on the side next the ruins was the way clear and suddenly”, everything through “and” is crossed out; 46.41.10-12: “instinctively” is hand-written above “she”, extending into right margin, “I believe” is hand-written below it in margin, no indication of intended insertion point; 47.3.16: no comma after “youth” 47.7.1-10: “I did not fear I only wished to close with them” hand-written above “I recognized these–I knew them of old and all”, no indication of intended insertion point; 47.9.5-11.7: “Hate leaped in me as in the old days” is hand-written after “soul.”, appears to continue on next line with “when when men of my blood came from the North” (the “N” in

“North” may or may not be capitalized), slopes up slightly, followed by “Ay though the whole spawn of Hell rise up from those caverns which honey comb the moors”, but the insertion and some of the readings are

conjectural; 47.14.9: features.; 47.14.10-15.11: “the shimmer of flint daggers in their crooked hands”

is typed above “square faces with their unhuman features. Then with a”, no indication of intended insertion point; 47.16.3: them,; 47.17.8: They; 47.19.6-20.4: “a flint dagger sank hilt deep in my thigh” is typed above “darkened the moon-silvered stones. Then the ghastly”, no indication of intended insertion point; 47.21.4: semicolon rather than comma after “mine” 47.23.1: original had “Mindless”, crossed out and “Heedless” handwritten above; 47.23.12: “anew” hand-written above semicolon; 47.25.2: “blindly”

is handwritten above “seeking”, no indication of intended insertion point; 47.25.4-26.12: “there the protection some vague instinct in obedience to some dim instinct just as women of her blood had done in by gone ages” is hand-written after “seeking” in the bottom margin of the page, “the” and “some vague instinct” are crossed out in pencil, some of the readings are conjectural; 47.26.12: at top of new page,

“there the protection, following some instinct.” appears to continue sentence from “seeking” at bottom of previous page, before handwritten material was inserted; 47.29.9: dreams; 47.34.8: They; 47.35.10: original had “eonic”, “ancient” hand-written above, obscured, reading conjectural; 47.41.2: semicolon rather than dash after “explain” 48.2.3-4.12: “Aye, such a shriek as could echo down the dusty corridors of lost ages and bring” hand-written above the line beginning “but I think that…”, “back from the whispering abyss of Eternity the ghost of the only one who could save” hand-written above the line beginning “Time to the Beings…”, “a girl of Celtic blood” hand-written above line beginning with new paragraph, “The foremost…” 48.6.12: original had “appeared”, crossed out, “stood” typed above; 48.7.4: original had “appearing”, “materializing” hand-written above; 48.9.9-10.7: “A druid, answering once more the desperate need of people” hand-written above “His brow was high and noble, his eyes mystic and”, “of his race” hand-written above beginning of next line, “far-seeing”, no indication of intended insertion point; 48.13.6: no comma after “suddenly” 48.15.1-16.5: “sword and shield against the” hand-written above “who raised his hand above”, “powers of darkness, protecting

helpless tribes as in the world's youth" hand-written above the line beginning "us as if in benediction…", no indication of intended insertion point, some readings conjectural

Dead Man's Hate

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, January 1930. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Tavern

Text taken from *Singers in the Shadows* (Donald M. Grant, 1970). No changes have been made for this edition.

Rattle of Bones

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, June 1929. 54.8.10: "the" not in original.

The Fear That Follows

Text taken from *Singers in the Shadows* (Donald M. Grant, 1970). No changes have been made for this edition.

The Spirit of Tom Molyneaux

Text taken from a scan of Howard's original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E.

Howard Foundation. 58.1.8: "the" not in typescript; 58.1.9: no comma after "living" 58.6: no section break; 59.3.9: good natured; 59.21.9: no comma after "indeed" 59.26.2-3: art, which considering; 59.28.14: no period after "cost" 59.32.9: horrizon; 59.36.10: full blooded; 60.3.4: "him" not in typescript; 60.8.2: no comma after "Jessel" 60.8.9: challengers,; 60.9.12: no comma after "York"

60.12.8: large,; 60.22.5: good natured; 60.24.5: unlying; 60.33.3: aluring; 60.38.9: caint; 60.38.14: aint; 60.40.6: mine; 61.5.8: aint; 61.11.7: tableaux; 61.13.14: by gone; 61.20.3: age old; 61.22.7: Eternity,; 61.22.10: no comma after "flown" 61.24.5: obesience; 61.26.4: rediculous; 61.35.4: clean

limbed; 62.4.8: no comma after “Ace” 62.4.11: no comma after “corner” 62.5.1: no comma after “crowd”

62.7.7: Gomez,— 62.12.14: no comma after “gorilla” 62.16.10: no comma after “Ace” 62.21.2: no comma after “wolf” 62.24.6: no comma after “back” 62.28.3: Gomez” 62.37.11-12: to the his; 62.38.8: vitallity; 63.4.1: straighted; 63.5.14: of; 63.7.2: Gomez” 63.19.7: Gomez” 63.21.13: no comma after

“and” 63.25.13: no comma after “before” 63.28.11: right hand; 63.30.5: left handers; 63.33.2: cant; 63.34.5: no comma after “try” 63.39.9: no comma after “Then” 64.7.2: no comma after “in” 64.24.2: my; 64.28.2: blood shot; 64.29.5: dont; 64.30.6: caint; 64.31.12: vitallity; 64.34.1: no paragraph break; 64.38.7: from,; 64.39.10: “Ace” repeated; 64.40.7: no comma after “cautiously” 67.1.17: comma rather than period after “canvas” 67.2.1: he; 67.2.5: no comma after “winning” 67.7.3: foe; 67.7.9-10: could only could not; 67.7.11: evert; 67.8.13: back pedalling; 67.12.13: no comma after “chin” 67.17.6: no comma after “corner” 67.25.15: aint; 67.28.1: no comma after “ring” 67.36.3: no comma after “left”

67.37.10: back pedalled; 68.2.13: “ribs” not in typescript; 68.18.7: unconciousness; 68.28.12: no comma after “eyes” 68.32.9: punishment,; 68.37.1: wind blown; 68.40.3: blood shot; 69.3.16-4.8: “the picture” through “violently” is in all capital letters; 69.4.8: period rather than exclamation point after

“violently” 69.7.9: wide eyed; 69.12.2: immobile faced; 69.12.5-13.2: “and to” through “that ring!” is in all capital letters; 69.14.5: no comma after “short” 69.14.9: barrel chested; 69.14.12: mighty limbed; 69.20.11: was; 69.23.2: come back; 69.31.5: Gomez” 69.31.8: back; 69.33.3: a; 69.33.5: tableaux; 69.35.10: no comma after “short” 69.36.14: no comma after “and” 69.38.4: comma rather than period after “shuddered” 70.2.5: vitallity; 70.6.10: conciousness; 70.10.12: life like; 70.17.10: steely nerved; 70.17.12: cold eyed; 70.22.2: period rather than comma after “did” 70.22.4: comma rather than period after “answered’

Casonetto’s Last Song

Text taken from *Etchings and Odysseys #1*, 1973. 71.14.5: bosom,; 73.14.4: comma rather than period after “Costigan’

The Touch of Death

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, February 1930. The only change made for this edition is the title. *Weird Tales* published the story under the title “The Fearsome Touch of Death.” In two separate lists of his stories typed by Howard, one made before the story appeared in print and the other after, the title was given as “The Touch of Death.”

Out of the Deep

Text taken from a scan of a carbon copy of Howard’s original typescript, provided by the Robert E.

Howard Foundation. 80.13.5-7: the passage is smudged from erasure and typeover, the reading is probable; 80.15.1: no comma after “Strange” 80.15.8: “the” not in typescript; 80.16.2: ex-sea-man; 80.16.6: Town; 80.16.9: no comma after “deep” 80.17.10-12 and 15: the passage is smudged from erasure and typeover, the reading is probable; 80.20.9: period rather than comma after “him” 80.21.2: For; 80.21.3: t’is; 81.5.4: period rather than comma after “turned” 81.5.6: no comma after “whispered”

81.5.12: “corpse” not in typescript (‘lifted the” ends first page and “and bore” begins second page); 81.9.14: no comma after “trance” 81.22.9: comma rather than period after “Leary” 81.23.11: no comma after “Now” 81.25.5: no comma after “this” 81.25.13: no comma after “him” 81.26.6: back; 81.36.12: no comma after “sleep” 81.37.12: no comma after “and” 81.38.3: no comma after “sand” 81.40.6: cold eyed; 82.13.1: “slend” ends one line of typescript and “-der” begins next line; 82.15.9: no comma after

“leaped” 82.17.5: comma rather than period after “Leary” 82.20.5: comma rather than period after

“shrieked” 82.20.11: t’was; 82.21.11: T’is; 82.22.12: no comma after “sleep” 82.25.11: no comma after

“were” 82.27.10: comma rather than period after “him” 82.32.3: comma rather than dash after “then”

82.38.5: period rather than comma after “night” 82.40.2: period rather than comma after “lies” 82.40.8: comma rather than period after “beards” 83.6.4: no comma after “white” 83.11.8: period rather than comma after “us” 83.11.10: comma rather than period after “he” 83.20.4: lead; 83.22.5: no comma after

“Hansen” 83.27.4: “the” not in typescript; 83.29.7: period rather than comma after “stocks” 83.29.9: no comma after “they” 83.33.3: no comma after “breast” 83.33.13: no comma after “and” 83.37.10: no comma after “and” 83.39.11: flaming eyed; 84.22.12-13: comma after “and” rather than “when”

84.26.1: no comma after “life” 84.34.4: period rather than colon after “know” 84.37.16: no comma after

“not” 87.5.6: no comma after “will” 87.17.1: no comma after “spine” 87.18.10: no comma after “make”

87.20.12: no comma after “then” 87.22.8: no comma after “still’

A Legend of Faring Town

Text taken from *Verses in Ebony* (George T Hamilton and Dale Brown, 1975). No changes have been made for this edition.

Restless Waters

Text taken from *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, No. 10, 1974. There is some evidence that the original title of this story may have been “The Horror at the Window.” 89.3.3: period rather than comma; 91.19.9: period rather than comma; 91.28.7: dammed; 93.2.7: Hanson; 93.29.3: period rather than comma *The Shadow of the Beast*

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 95.7.16: comma after “shot”

95.8.12: pale faced; 95.9.3: horror struck; 95.9.4: comma after “struck” 95.10.4: grim faced; 95.12.4: comma after “hunted” 95.13.7: period rather than comma; 96.1.7: period rather than comma; 96.1.11: havent; 96.3.2: isnt; 96.3.5: period rather than comma; 96.3.8: comma rather than period; 96.5.4: no comma after “window” 96.7.12-14: text obscured by overtyping but reading seems probable; 96.13.1: no opening quotation mark; 96.14.1: period rather than comma; 96.17.5: period rather than comma; 96.17.8: no comma after “harshly” 96.17.9: comma after

“rising” 96.19.2: Dont; 96.24.3: aint; 96.24.7: period rather than comma; 96.25.8: no comma after

“camp” 96.26.5: Dont; 96.33.7: aint; 96.36.9: see; 96.38.2: aint; 96.38.3: nowhere’s; 96.40.1: Aint; 97.1.15: foun; 97.3.10: comma after “night” 97.5.5: didnt; 97.7.11: drawn out; 97.8.1: what-ever; 97.8.11: locallity; 97.8.14: south; 97.15.1: Dont; 97.15.7: comma rather than period; 97.28.4: animal like; 97.40.1: comma after “then” 98.6.10: sure footed; 98.13.8-10: hand to hand; 98.18.10: moons; 98.19.6: some where; 98.31.4: comma after “mansion” 98.40.14: comma after “suddenly,” “and” not in original; 99.20.11: comma after “decades” 99.21.3: bat’s; 99.23.1: stair ways; 99.25.10: has; 99.36.1: winced; 99.40.2: pow; 100.16.5: no comma after “halted” 100.26.7: comma after “was” 100.29.1: no comma after “nothing” 100.29.5: soul freezing; 101.7.10: “some” repeated; 101.23.7: proceded; 101.24.3-8: “on an” ends first line of page; beginning of next line is overtyped; it appears, based on clarity of letters and spacing in relation to the continuation of the line, that “a discharged shell and I hurled” was typed over “empty chamber and I hurled” 101.26.2: back flung; 102.8.2: no comma after

“corridor” 102.11.5: concious; 102.16.6: conciousness; 102.17.12: no comma after “closed” 102.22.4: no comma after “insane” 102.23.10: no comma after “tears” 102.27.15: no comma after “time”

102.28.13: horrizon; 102.30.10: couldnt; 102.32.3: no comma after “posse” 102.32.14: wasnt; 102.34.6: forelorn; 102.36.8: What; 102.37.8: unconcious; 102.40.3: comma rather than period; 103.3.4: dont; 103.3.13: comma after “war” 103.8.1: “him” not in original; 103.11.7: comma rather than period; 103.14.5: comma rather than period; 103.15.1: Dont; 103.15.3:

period rather than comma; 103.15.10: Dont; 103.16.5: didnt; 103.18.2: earth bound; 103.21.10: no comma after “then” 103.23.11: no comma after “mounted” 103.27.2: But; 103.30.1: no comma after “looked’

The Dead Slaver’s Tale

Text taken from *Weirdbook Eight*, 1973. 104.1.7: no comma after “sea’

Dermod’s Bane

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 105.5.7: no comma after “Tribes” 105.18.4: ancestor; 106.9.9: an ellipsis(…) follows the closing quotation mark, with no paragraph break before “I went to Galway.” 106.11.11: familes; 106.13.1: familes; 106.13.6: familes; 106.24.14: devided; 106.27.1: MacMurraughs; 106.29.4: no comma after “Pembroke” 107.1.14: no comma after “last” 107.2.1: comma after “band” 107.4.10: farmer’s; 107.5.1: shepherd’s; 107.5.12: “a” not in original; 107.14.2: country side; 107.19.10: The; 107.24.2: no comma after “so” 107.26.9: you; 107.29.7: Demod’s; 107.31.4: no comma after “know”

108.2.7: “soul” not in original; 108.3.17: eye lids; 108.19.1: silkly; 108.19.6: moonmist; 108.21.9: mist like; 108.26.5: my; 108.26.12: comma rather than semi-colon; 108.28.2: wither; 108.31.1: no comma after “vision” 108.31.9: tusk like; 108.33.1: pent house; 108.35.7: comma rather than period; 108.36.1: no closing quotation mark (the dash is at the extreme right edge of the paper); 108.39.2: irresistably; 108.40.6: keen edged; 109.6.13: soul easing; 109.9.9: no comma after “Did” 109.9.16: long dead; 109.10.3: “me” not in original

The Hills of the Dead

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, August 1930. 121.25.2: he; 124.12.8: easy; 130.10.5: blood brother *Dig Me No Grave*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, February 1937. 136.24.5: oriental; 139.7.6: oriental; 139.36.9: Phenician; 139.39.9: oriental; 140.15.7: oriental; 140.27.6: oriental; 141.20.8: oriental *The Song of a Mad Minstrel*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, February–March 1931. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Children of the Night

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, April–May 1931. 148.1: a line of asterisks marks the section break; 148.8.2: “deer-skin” hyphenated at line break; 153.38: a line of asterisks marks the section break; 156.32.2: mediæval

Musings

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 158.1.7: semicolon rather than colon; 158.7.3: no comma after “that” 158.9.7: colon rather than semicolon

The Black Stone

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, November 1931. 160.26.3-4: “Midsummer’s Night” not capitalized here, though it is capitalized elsewhere in the story; 161.13.6: gleam (‘glean” in Howard’s earlier draft of the story); 162.4.16: no comma after “and” 162.15.8: black-eddy (‘back-eddy” in Howard’s earlier draft); 162.23.7: Goeffrey; 162.26.2: mine; 163.41.7: aboriginies; 170.1.5: rythmically; 170.37.3: ecstacy *The Thing on the Roof*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, February 1932. 179.7.14: the period is placed outside the quotation mark *The Dweller in Dark Valley*

Text taken from *Magazine of Horror*, November 1965

The Horror from the Mound

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 185.8.9: “farm-land” hyphenated at line break; 186.7.9: comma after “creek” 186.21.10: thes; 186.34.5: hemself; 187.14.1: “Senor” not underlined to indicate italics; 187.16.9: every; 187.17.8-9: hear-tell; 188.9.8: “Senor” not underlined to indicate italics; 188.35.10: grunned; 188.38.7: no comma after “decided”

189.11.9: cam; 189.17.4: befool; 189.18.10: refained; 189.38.7-8: treasure-trove; 190.4.4: no comma after “halted” 190.5.4: undeiable; 190.13.8: no comma after “stone”

190.30.11: “the” not in original; 191.2.9: tp; 191.8.10: forebidden; 191.34.12: Greaser; 191.35.6: trued; 192.1.9: cruse; 192.3.15: Spigs; 192.29.11: any one; 193.20.4: thre; 194.5.4: jjust; 195.1.7: Some one; 195.11.7: any one; 195.16.14: glassy eyed; 195.17.8: no comma after “creek” 196.41.14: long dead; 197.10.2: “Senor” not underlined to indicate italics; 197.22.4: light; 198.21.13: fear crazed *A Dull Sound as of Knocking*

Text taken from Glenn Lord’s transcription of Howard’s original. No changes have been made for this edition.

People of the Dark

Text taken from *Strange Tales*, June 1932. 203.10.9: comma after “hills” 203.35.1: loin cloth; 203.41.4: no comma after “reavers” 206.6.4: no comma after “where” 206.14.5: serpent like; 206.34.12: in it; 212.24.6: a wash; 214.5.6–7: little people

Delenda Est

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. The typescript is untitled; the title is Glenn Lord’s. 217.13.7: aborbed; 217.19.9: semicolon rather than comma; 218.14.1: semicolon rather than comma; 218.17.2: semicolon rather than comma; 218.26.9: horrizons; 218.34.3: no comma after “rival” 218.35.7: semicolon rather than comma; 219.3.3: with; 219.4.10: “westward” is typed above “before” with no indication of the intended insertion point; 219.8.6: “of” is typed above the space between “much” and “physical” with no indication of the intended insertion point; 219.9.3: vigour; 220.24.6: “not” not in original; 220.33.1: semicolon rather than comma; 221.40.2: rhyhmic; 222.34.6: no comma after “hand’

The Cairn on the Headland

Text taken from *Strange Tales*, January 1933. In a letter to H. P. Lovecraft, ca. December 1932

(probably very shortly after the magazine had appeared), Howard wrote: “The editor took liberties with

‘The Cairn on the Headland.’ In the original version, O’Brien was born in America. The editor changed this and made O’Brien a native of Ireland, but neglected to change the line: ‘We were countrymen in that we born in the same land.’ That would seem to make ‘Ortali’ an Irishman, too, when I intended him for an American-born Italian.” We have restored the characters’ original nationalities by using text from an existing draft typescript of the story. That existing draft does not bear a title, indicating it was probably a first draft. The magazine version features an epigraph: “And the next instant this great red loon was shaking me like a dog shaking a rat. ‘Where is Meve MacDonnal?’ he was screaming. By the saints, it’s a grisly thing to hear a madman in a lonely place at midnight screaming the name of a woman dead three hundred years.—The Longshoreman’s Tale.” This epigraph does not appear in the draft typescript, and as it telegraphs an important story element, which seems uncharacteristic of Howard, we have left it off.

224.34.6: fired; 227.29.4: *Strange Tales* has, after “American,” “though born and raised here” text here is from the draft typescript; 227.29.6: typescript has “answered, “my” 228.20.2: *Strange Tales* has

“ancestors” “birth” in draft typescript; 228.20.12-13: *Strange Tales* has “have passed the best part of my life” “was born” in draft typescript; 235.38.4: comma after “cairn” 237.39.1: comma after

“superstition’

Worms of the Earth

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, November 1932. In a letter to H. P. Lovecraft, circa December 1932, Howard noted several errors in the magazine appearance of the story: “Concerning “Worms of the Earth”–I must have

been unusually careless when I wrote that, considering the errors–such as “her” for

“his”, “him” for “himself”, “loathsome” for “loathing”, etc.. I’m at a loss to say why I spelled Eboracum as Ebbracum. I must investigate the matter. I know I saw it spelled that way, somewhere; it’s not likely I would make such a mistake entirely of my own volition, though I do frequently make errors. Somehow, in my mind, I have a vague idea that it’s connected in some way with the Gaelic “Ebroch”–York.”

240.8.3: Ebbracum; 243.13.5: him; 244.1.6: Ebbracum; 248.15.1: Ebbracum; 248.17.11: Ebbracum; 249.21.9: Ebbracum; 251.11.2: Ebbracum; 251.17.10: Ebbracum; 253.3.3: laugh; 253.11.6: her; 253.11.15: loathsome; 253.25.5: there is a dash rather than a hyphen in “night-things” 260.1.3: comma after “cast” 262.19.1: Ebbracum; 266.29.1: Ebbracum’s; 266.32.5: *Cæsar The Symbol*

Text taken from *Ariel*, Autumn 1976. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Valley of the Lost

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. There are two draft typescripts extant: one titled, the other not. The titled draft has numerous editorial markings, probably by *Strange Tales* editor Harry Bates, who wrote to Howard on October 4, 1932: “Mr. Clayton the other day instructed me to discontinue Strange Tales, and as a result I have to return your story, “The Valley of the Lost,” even marked up as it is with the editorial pencilings. I started to rub out the pencilings but that did not seem to improve the looks of the manuscript much, so I left off.”

Many of these editorial markings entirely obscure the original underlying text, making some readings problematic. 269.12.1: “South-west” hyphenated at line break; 269.18.1: right (typed to extreme right edge of paper); 269.18.6: Reynolds; 269.19.1: Donnelly (typed to extreme right edge of paper); 269.22.9: whole-sale; 270.1.10: comma after “pay” 270.3.2: punctuation following “range” obscured; 270.4.1: developement; 270.5.1:

country-side; 270.8.8: Reynolds; 270.9.5: Reynolds; 270.11.11: comma after “down” 270.13.6: well now; 270.22.9: it appears a comma was marked out after “speedy”

270.24.7: awhile; 270.27.4: Reynolds; 270.28.3: no comma after “slope” 270.32.6: it appears a comma was marked out after “Ord” 270.35.13: didnt; 270.36.17: no closing quotation mark (typed to extreme right edge of paper); 270.37.1: comma after “Well”, no dash; 270.37.8: comma after “Fletcher”, no dash; 270.38.5: dont; 270.39.8: its; 271.15.17: comma after “valley” 271.27.11: he; 271.31.10: aint; 271.33.5: cant; 271.37.11: cant; 271.38.14: cant; 272.1.3: wont; 272.3.15: at least one character has been obscured before “right”, possibly “a” right” or “a-right” 272.12.8: cant; 272.15.12: something obscured before “walking”, probably “a-” 272.23.2: Reynolds; 272.24.9: no comma after “and”

272.41.4: shorted; 272.41.11: redmen; 273.6.7: re-opened; 273.11.9-10: comma after “Valley” rather than “and” 273.14.7: comma after “stones” 273.17.5: half destroyed; 273.20.2: and which; 273.30.11: country-side; 274.27.1: “a” not in titled typescript, is in untitled draft; 274.33.3: it appears a comma was marked out after “where” 274.33.8: it appears a comma was marked out after “sanity” 274.36.9: high heeled; 274.41.9: foot-step; 275.8.1: a word has been marked out before “dead” “stone-dead” in earlier draft; 275.18.5: suddeness; 276.4.3: no comma after “shaken” 276.20.1: letters are marked out after

“burro” 276.22.12: it appears a comma was marked out after “aversion” 276.22.13: comma after “now”

276.30.7: comma after “was” 277.19.9: punctuation after “ears” obscured, possibly a colon; 277.20.3: word obscured, probably “he” 277.25.9: under-tone; 277.34.9: squamy; 277.40.13: conciousness; 278.1.6: inner-most; 278.4.5-6: no commas after “dim” and “strange” 278.28.10: it appears a comma was marked out after “valley” 281.4.5: inhumaness; 281.8.8: an editorial marking for a comma is superimposed over Howard’s typed punctuation, possibly a semicolon; 281.9.11: semicolon rather than comma; 281.11.8: a letter has been marked out, possibly this read “survivals” 281.31.8: the initial letter is faint in the copy; “Hell” in earlier draft; 281.37.12: an editorial marking for a comma is superimposed over

Howard’s typed punctuation, possibly a semicolon; 281.38.1: an editorial marking for a comma is superimposed over Howard’s typed punctuation, possibly a semicolon; 282.2.1: carvent (earlier draft has “crystallinecarven”); 282.5.8: ever (typed to extreme right edge of paper); earlier draft has “every”

282.9.11: network; 282.10.1: honey-combing; 282.26.10: redmen; 282.29.1: no comma after

“Meanwhile” 282.35.12: “to” is written (not in REH’s hand) over a typed word beginning with “o”, probably “of” 282.37.7: it appears a comma was marked out after “gain” 283.13.12: something is marked out, no more than two letters, between “stood” and “among” 283.14.5: land-slide; 283.32.6: it appears a comma was marked out after “eyes” 283.33.6: A word has been marked out, with “Its”

hand-written above (not in REH’s hand); earlier draft has “The” 283.41.1: A word has been marked out; earlier draft has “And” 284.16.7: lower-case “l” hand-written over indecipherable typed letter; 284.16.9: upper-case “H” hand-written over indecipherable typed letter; 284.18.7: it appears a comma has been marked out after “sane” 284.19.6: upper-case “H” hand-written over indecipherable typed letter; 285.17.1: punctuation obscured by editorial marking; 285.24.1: A word has been marked out, probably

“And” 285.26.10: side-ways; 285.28.8: comma after “serpent” rather than “and” 286.3.1: it appears a comma has been marked out after “walks” 286.10.9: no comma after “sunlight” 286.26.10: titer; 286.31.1: concious; 286.40.9: didnt; 287.2.5: wasnt; 287.2.7: a letter marked out before “it”, probably

“h” 287.2.15: a letter marked out before “it”, probably “h” 287.8.9: word has been marked out, appears to be “done” 287.9.5: word of about 3-4 letters marked out, possibly “done” 287.16.1-19.4: these four sentences are all written as one paragraph; 287.18.3: its; 287.19.4: something has been scratched out after “look”, possibly dashes or an ellipsis; 287.24.8: punctuation (if any) obscured by editorial marking; earlier draft has comma after “fists” 287.28.3: no comma after “and” 287.28.7: it appears a comma

has been marked out after “sticks” 287.31.14: it appears a comma has been marked out after “saddle”

287.32.8: it appears a comma has been marked out after “fuse” 287.33.11: earth-quake; 287.37.3: a letter appears to have been marked out after “rock”, possibly “s” 288.20.1: Reynolds *The Hoofed Thing*

Text taken from *Weirdbook Three*, 1970 (as “Usurp the Night”). 289.8.1: of; 289.12.1: “run-down”

hyphenated at line break; 289.18.4: delapidation; 290.18.3: no closing quotation mark; 293.3.8: profusedly; 294.14.12: comma after “emerge” 298.25.11: old fashioned; 298.36.3: comma rather than period after “panted” 301.9.18: no comma after ‘I’ 302.40.9: “a” not in original *The Noseless Horror*

Text taken from *Magazine of Horror*, February 1970. 305.5.7: no period after “experience” 308.20.2: lauresl; 308.21.2: no closing quotation mark; 309.22.9: lights; 310.16.6: eyes; 310.34.7: no period after

“barred” 311.6.6-7: “noseless one” set in double quotation marks rather than single; 312.27.4: comma after “indeed” 313.1.13: stair case; 314.20.7: no; 314.39.7: amazed; 317.5.15: brinks; 317.9.3: “Singh”

not in original

The Dwellers Under the Tomb

Text taken from *Lost Fantasies 4*, 1976. Two earlier draft typescripts are extant, one 13 pages and one 18 pages. The typescript used for the *Lost Fantasies* (and *Black Canaan*, Berkley, 1978) publications was not available for this edition. 318.3.2: squeled; 318.21.7: deoman; 319.11.1: sould; 319.17.5: death rattle; 319.18.3: Jonas; 319.37.2: mightmare; 320.8.5-9.3: text between “strike” and “sensation” not in *Lost Fantasies* version; text taken from 18 page draft typescript; 320.27.8: He; 320.31.9: figeting; 320.32.11: A; 320.33.5: no closing quotation mark; 320.39.14: he’s; 321.11.6: that; 321.13.11: through; 321.16.1: undulation; 321.20.10: a; 321.23.8: ancestrial; 321.25.4: stripe; 321.29.8: rock; 321.31.7: for;

321.41.2: “it” not in *Lost Fantasies* version; this passage not found in drafts; 322.11.14: shattering; 322.12.8: moon lit; 322.20.2: feat; 322.25.3: comma rather than period after “know”

322.26.3-4: Itmight; 322.36.3: recognized; 323.16.8: creek; 323.41.8: lie; 324.1.10: “not” not in *Lost Fantasies* version; passage not found in drafts; 324.13.4: reverted; 324.27.4: appaled; 324.33.4: “in”

not in *Lost Fantasies* version; passage not found in drafts; 324.37.5: closing quotation mark after “out.”

324.39.1: Open quotation mark before “Are” 325.22.12: earthly; no comma after “earthly” 326.14.4: desipte; 326.14.7: sceptics; 326.26.6: no open quotation mark; 329.3.6: no comma after “roughly”

329.16.3: vertiable; 329.16.11: jug; 330.23.2: though; 330.25.3: back; 330.32.1: steal-thy; 331.1.2: droppin; 331.22.17: comma after “rare” 332.31.11: comma after “labyrinths” 333.29.14: errored; 334.16.1: in habited; 334.25.9: no comma after “sliding” 334.33.3-34.2: text between “be” and “trace”

not in *Lost Fantasies* version; passage not found in earlier drafts; text taken from *Black Canaan*; 335.26.10: “writhing” not in *Lost Fantasies* version, text from 18 page draft typescript; 335.36.6: back; 335.39.6: shone; 336.1.13: guant; 336.13.12: no comma after “grey” 336.14.5: eyes; 336.22.8: sone *An Open Window*

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, September 1932. No changes have been made for this edition.

The House of Arabu

Text taken from *Avon Fantasy Reader*, 1952 (as “The Witch from Hell’s Kitchen”). An untitled first draft typescript and an incomplete, titled, second draft typescript of this story are extant. It seems likely that someone else, perhaps agent Oscar Friend, was responsible for rewriting the story for *Avon Fantasy Reader*. The heading was not used in *Avon Fantasy Reader*; it is taken from the second draft.

339.5.10: “love-making” hyphenated at line break; 340.34.4: no comma after “conversation” 343.5.7: no closing quotation mark after “accursed” 343.11.11: Mycenæans; 345.26.7: networks; 353.21.1: no closing quotation mark after “eternity” 354.36.4: word; 357.21.1: no comma after “with” 357.32.2: like; 358.32.7: laugher; 358.33.9: making

The Man on the Ground

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, July 1933. No changes have been made for this edition.

Old Garfield’s Heart

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, December 1933. No changes have been made for this edition.

Kelly the Conjure-Man

Text taken from *The Howard Collector*, Summer 1964. 376.8.7: 1850’s; 377.19.12: the period is placed after the closing quotation mark; 378.22.5: “70’s

Black Canaan

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, June 1936. 385.17.8: “white-washed” hyphenated at line break (hyphenated in draft typescript); 385.20.5: the period is placed after the closing quotation mark; 399.21.14: “criss-crossed” hyphenated at line break (hyphenated in draft typescript); 402.26.6: period rather than comma after “whispered” 405.11.14: *dance*;

To a Woman

Text taken from *Modern American Poetry—1933.* No changes have been made for this edition.

One Who Comes at Eventide

Text taken from *Modern American Poetry—1933*. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Haunter of the Ring

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, June 1934. No changes have been made for this edition.

Pigeons from Hell

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, May 1938. 426.33.13: “sleep-walker” hyphenated at line break; 427.13.6: “corpse-like” hyphenated at line break; 428.35.2: “hat-brim” hyphenated at line break; 428.39.11: county-seat; 430.22.5: “sun-bathed” hyphenated at line break; 434.5.12: “down” repeated; 435.35.7: county-seat; 436.18.11: county-seat; 439.25.1: “men-folks” hyphenated at line break; 443.10.8: builded

The Dead Remember

Text taken from *Argosy*, August 15, 1936. No changes have been made for this edition.

The Fire of Asshurbanipal

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, December 1936. 461.35.14: no period after “city” 463.17.5: the comma is placed after the closing quotation mark

Fragment

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, December 1937. No changes have been made for this edition.

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

Text taken from *Weird Tales*, October 1937. No changes have been made for this edition.

Golnor the Ape

Text taken from *Crypt of Cthulhu*, Roodmas 1985. 483.9.1: comma after ‘night’

Spectres in the Dark

Text taken from Howard's original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 487.3.13: six hyphens rather than dash; 487.8.2: seven hyphens rather than dash; 487.15.10: Fraser; 487.15.11-12: "Golden Bough" not italicized; 487.17.3: no comma after "However"

487.17.13: reluctrance; 487.19.3: hours; 487.21.4: painting; 487.24.1: mallet like; 487.31.1: no opening quotation mark; 487.31.12: comma rather than period after "first" 487.37.3: period rather than comma after "repeated" 488.7.5: period rather than comma after "game" 488.8.7: Dat; 488.22.3: bot; 488.22.10: bot; 488.24.2: "ten" enclosed in double rather than single quotation marks; 488.24.15: dats; 488.25.4: dats; 488.25.16: aint; 488.28.14: comma rather than period after "life" 488.30.6: wouldnt; 488.32.10: aint; 488.33.5: aint; 488.33.9: dontcha; 488.34.14: dont; 488.36.7: wuznt; 488.38.13: didn't; 488.41.5: involuntarilly, followed by comma rather than period; 489.1.7: taint; 489.1.11: cant; 489.5.2: he; 489.5.9: comma rather than period after "manner" 489.5.11: dont; 489.8.1: some; 489.9.2: period rather than comma after "like" 489.10.1: comma rather than period after "sensations" 489.10.11: cant; 489.11.15: aint; 489.12.1: No opening quotation mark; 489.12.6: dont; 489.13.1: his; 489.13.4: comma rather than period after "broodingly" 489.17.5: comma rather than period after "sullenly"

489.19.8: concious; 489.20.13: comma rather than period after "door" 489.20.14: Its; 489.24.15: Thats; 489.27.7: isnt; 489.30.2: youre; 489.30.3: period rather than comma after "right" 489.30.5: comma rather than period after "muttered" 489.33.2: period rather than comma after "late" 489.38.1: no comma after "Hallworthy" 490.1.9: period rather than comma after "visit" 490.1.11: comma rather than period after "remarked" 490.2.5: America; 490.3.7: comma rather than period after "interrupted"

490.3.9: cant; 490.4.5: period rather than comma after "Joan" 490.4.8: comma rather than period after

"mildly" 490.5.3: didnt; 490.11.3: comma rather than period after "Hallworthy" 490.13.7: abhorence; 490.14.15: dont; 490.16.13: period

rather than comma after “us” 490.16.16: comma rather than period after “calmly” 490.22.6: period rather than comma after “Van Dorn” 490.22.8: comma rather than period after “dissented” 490.26.4: period rather than comma after “Malcolm” 490.26.6: no comma after

“Joan” 490.27.2: comma rather than period after “uppermost” 490.27.4: dont; 490.28.4: period rather than comma after “know” 490.28.6: comma rather than period after “answered” 490.32.13: no punctuation after “bloodshot” 490.36.6: comma rather than period after “exclaiming” 490.36.8: dont; 490.36.11: Its; 490.37.9: thats; 490.40.7: period rather than comma after “fellow” 490.40.10: no punctuation after “came” 490.40.11: no punctuation after “soothing” 490.41.1: comma rather than period after “calm” 490.41.6: no punctuation after “know” 491.1.4: period rather than comma after “Clement”

491.5.9: comma rather than period after “haltingly” 491.12.5: dash set before rather than after quotation mark; 491.14.1: comma rather than dash; 491.15.7: hasnt; 491.16.10: he; 491.16.12: comma rather than period after “violently” 491.23.5: excercize; 491.31.2: hi; 491.32.3: no punctuation after “I”

491.34.5: period rather than comma after “Clement” 491.34.8: comma rather than period after

“presently” 492.1.1: no punctuation after “physically” 492.4.2: comma after “have” 492.19.13: no comma after “sensation” 492.20.1: evidently; 492.21.4: no period after “movies” 492.21.5: he; 492.24.13: comma after “think” 492.25.14: didn’t; 492.31.7: comma after “kill” 492.34.10: period rather than comma after “himself” 492.34.12: comma rather than period after “answered” 493.3: no blank line space; 493.17: no blank line space; 493.25.1: recieved; 493.28.6: no comma after “assaults”

493.30.11: Hallworthy’s; 493.39.1: unconcious; 493.40.14: wilfull, followed by comma; 494.1.11: no comma after “judgment” 494.1.14: no comma after “needed” 494.6.9: period rather than comma after

“woman” 494.6.11: comma rather than period after “answered” 494.9.8: period rather than comma after

“child” 494.13.10: thats; 494.15.9: coercing; 494.16.3: tyrranny; 494.24.6: period rather than comma after “right” 494.24.8: comma rather than period after “said” 494.25.5: comma rather than period after

“Hallworthy” 494.28.5: comma rather than period after “hand” 494.28.8: no comma after “then”

494.31.1: No opening quotation mark; 494.37.12: assimulate; 495.3: no blank line space; 495.9.1: no comma after “New York” 495.10: no blank line space; 495.11.5: “days” was originally typed, then

“nights” typed above, with a slash marking indicating placement following “days”, but “days” was not crossed out; 495.15.7: darknes (paper torn); 495.17.1: sensatio (typed to right edge of paper); 495.22: no blank line space; 495.23.10: concious; 495.27.1: “were” was originally typed, then “had been” was typed above, with no indication of placement; 495.28.3: no comma after “Costigan” 495.29.3: no comma after “room” 496.5.10: over took; 496.8.3: no comma after “that” 496.17.1: Whats; 496.18.9-14: “reminding me” was originally typed, then “in a manner that remined me” was typed above with no indication of placement; 496.18.13: remined; 496.20.1: period rather than comma after

“Nothin’” 496.20.9: comma rather than period after “statement” 496.22.1: comma rather than period after “cunning” 496.22.11: wont; 496.30.2-4: “somewhat suprized” was originally typed, with

“wondering idly at” typed above; 496.34.2: “was just” originally typed, with “upon” typed above; 496.36.3: hasnt; 496.38.8: skurry; 497.2.2: it; 497.2.11: comma rather than period after “child” 497.4.2: if; 497.5.5: comma rather than period after “dumfounded” 497.7.5: clothings; 497.7.6: dissarranged; 497.13.4: dont; 497.13.5: comma rather than period after “understand” 497.13.6: Why *The House*

Text taken from Howard’s original typescript, a copy of which was provided by the Robert E. Howard Foundation. 498.1.15: Why; 498.12.3: explai (typed to right edge of paper); 498.27.4: no comma after

“brother” 498.28.9: sales-man; 498.38.7: mad-house; 499.5.10: no comma after “Justin” 499.6.1: no period after “lunacy” (typed to right edge of paper); 499.17.4: mad hous (typed to right edge of paper); 499.19.8: complete; 499.26.9: dew wet; 499.36.3: comma rather than period after “exclaimed” 500.9.9: any one; 500.11.16: momento; 500.12.8: big brotherly; 500.14.11: good natured; 500.16.7: round faced; 500.17.9: narrow bridged; 500.18.12: towseled; 500.23.3: himself; 500.25.2: good natured; 500.31.1: industrially; 500.37.8: what ever; 500.41.1: socialogy; 501.2.9: histor (typed to right edge of page); 501.4.1: no opening quotation mark; 501.6.6: back ground; 501.8.4: Poets; 501.11.6: conciousness; 501.13.3: comma rather than period after “snapped” 501.22.12: country-side; 501.28.5: dreams; 501.29.7: no comma after “Evidently” 501.31.4: an (typed to right edge of paper); 501.31.12: no comma after “reply” 501.33.6: coul (typed to right edge of paper); 501.34.14: comma after “added”

rather than “that” 501.37.11-12: kodak snap shot; 502.1.2: Its; 502.3.5: comma rather than period after

“up” 502.4.1: Lets; 502.9.10: tempermental; 502.11.8: knife edge; 502.17.10: Why; 502.20.5: didnt; 502.22.5: comma rather than period after “admitted” 502.23.3: comma rather than period after “cried”

502.26.6: gibuous; 502.26.8: no comma after “mistily” 502.27.3: tumble down; 502.31.9: snap shot; 502.32.1: exclude; 502.37.3: its; 502.38.3: its; 502.38.10: its; 502.39.5-6: the house; 502.41.4: hasnt; 503.5.4-5: the house; 503.10.7: comma rather than period after “Conrad” 503.10.9: dont; 503.23.5: doesnt; 503.31.2: visi (typed to right edge of paper); 503.34.4: metropoli (typed to right edge of paper); 504.1.10: comma rather than period after “mayor” 504.6.5: comma rather than period after “Conrad”

504.8.6: comma rather than period after “Skuyler” 504.11.7: Neither; 504.13.1: barreness; 504.16.10: comma rather than period after “Conrad” 504.17.1: encountere (typed to right edge of paper); 504.25.4: If; 504.29.2: no comma after “it” 504.29.16-30.1: the house; 504.32.4: The; 504.33.10: some-one; 504.35.2: some-one; 504.35.9: boot-leg

Untitled Fragment

Text taken from *The Howard Collector*, Spring 1967. 506.3.5: comma after "Africa'

I would like to thank Rob Bliss, Dean Howarth, Emma Clayton, and Simon Bisley for their friendship and creative support. All the guys at Paradox Entertainment and the R. E. Howard estate for having faith in me. Special thanks to Jim & Ruth for all of your help in finally getting the project started and making my job so enjoyable. Finally my Mum Debbie for always being there when I need her, my wife Karen and son Harrison for keeping me sane and making me laugh, I love you.

Greg Staples

Many, many thanks to Rob Roehm for his efforts in getting all the texts together for this book, and to Patrice Louinet and Paul Herman for their help and counsel. Thanks, once more, to Stuart, for his customary patience with my deadline-pushing ways, and to Jim and Ruth for all their hard work in bringing this thing together. To the gang at Del Rey for their patience and expertise. To Marcelo—this first experience of doing a book without you just made me realize all the more how much you did, and what a genius you are. To Glenn Lord, for all the years of friendship and help. To Steve Trout, who long ago opened my eyes to Howard's horror stories. And as always to Shelly, all my love, for patiently putting up with me when I get absorbed in these projects.

Rusty Burke

We'd like to thank Marcelo Anciano–the catalyst for this series. Thanks also to Rusty, Stuart, Jay, and Greg. Very special thanks goes to Ed Waterman and Patricia Keegan.

Jim & Ruth Keegan

For this, my ninth book in this series, I'd like to thank Marcelo Anciano, who started the ball rolling over ten years ago, for involving me in a dream project; Rusty Burke for his dedication to all things Howardian; and Jim and Ruth Keegan for keeping the job on track. I've enjoyed working on the

prevous books, but I've been waiting for this one from the start—Howard's horror stories—in my opinion, the cream of the crop. I can't wait to read it!

Stuart Williams

THE FULLY ILLUSTRATED ROBERT E. HOWARD LIBRARY

from Del Rey Books

The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian

The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane

The Bloody Crown of Conan

Bran Mak Morn: The Last King

The Conquering Sword of Conan

Kull: Exile of Atlantis

The Best of Robert E. Howard

Volume 1: Crimson Shadows

The Best of Robert E. Howard

Volume 2: Grim Lands

The Horror Stories of Robert E. Howard

The Horror Stories of Robert E. Howard is a work of fiction. Names, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

A Del Rey Trade Paperback Original

Copyright © 2008 by Robert E. Howard Properties, LLC

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Del Rey, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

DEL REY is a registered trademark and the Del Rey colophon is a trademark of Random House, Inc.

Some material contained herein may be public domain in certain territories. No portion of this book may be reproduced—mechanically, electronically, or by any other means, including photocopying—without written permission of the applicable copyright holder.

Previous publication information for the stories contained in this work can be found beginning on frontMatter.

Published by arrangement with Robert E. Howard Properties, LLC.

ROBERT E. HOWARD, BRAN MAK MORN, and related names, logos, characters, and distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks or registered trademarks of Robert E. Howard Properties, LLC. All rights reserved. SOLOMON KANE and related names, logos, characters, and distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks or registered trademarks of Solomon Kane, Inc. All rights reserved.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Howard, Robert Ervin, 1906–1936.

The horror stories of Robert E. Howard / illustrated by Greg Staples.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

eISBN: 978-0-345-50974-1

1. Horror tales, American. I. Title.

PS3515.O842A6 2007

813'.52—dc22 2008028474

www.delreybooks.com

Art Directors: Jim & Ruth Keegan

Editor: Rusty Burke

v1.0

OceanofPDF.com